

# *Marriage For Two*

ARTHUR  
SUMERS  
ROCHE











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*By*

ARTHUR SOMERS ROCHE

*Author of "What I Know about You"*



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MARRIAGE FOR TWO

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MISS CATHLEEN FOX:

MISS FRANCES WEST GILLMORE:

*In accordance with agreement duly entered into at Palm Beach, Florida, in March, 1929, and later ratified at White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, between you two jointly as parties of the first part, and myself as party of the second part, herewith one dedication of one novel, to wit, "Marriage for Two," to be yours jointly and severally from now until the end of time, which is exactly as long as you will both own the affection of*

ARTHUR SOMERS ROCHE



*MARRIAGE*  
*FOR TWO*



# MARRIAGE FOR TWO

## CHAPTER I

I'M GLAD," said Tracy, "that you're *marrying* him." If the implication of his speech were not clear, the slight stress he placed on the next to the last word made his meaning brutally explicit.

"I thought," said the girl, "that you loved me."

"Well?" said Tracy.

"If you cared for me, loved me the way you've said you did, you'd not intimate——"

He interrupted her with a laugh that held equal parts of scorn for her and contempt for himself.

"Loved you? Good God, haven't I made it clear enough?"

"You're not making it clear now," she accused. "You talk of my marrying Frank Burton as though—as if—well, as though I'd contemplated something else."

"Which," he sneered, "you never have, of course."

Her blue eyes—those eyes whose color he had often compared to the blue of the heavens, to the latter's disadvantage—hardened. The sweetly red lips, fashioned for kisses and soft phrases—he remembered how she had flushed when he told her this—were compressed now.

"How can you say such things to a woman you profess to love?" she asked.

"We don't always respect where we love," he replied.

"I'm finding that out," she retorted.

There were implications in her tones now, and his face, that had been pale, colored slightly.

"Sorry if I've been a cad," he said. "Only when a woman——"

She interrupted him. "I thought you'd be a better loser, Larry."

He stared at her. "You talk as though this were a game." His voice rose. "A game, by God, and you the prize, eh? Well, Helen, sometimes games are crookedly won, cheats play in them, and you can't expect an honest player to accept a dishonest defeat as cheerfully—why, Helen, marriage isn't a game of bridge. You don't deal the cards again when the rubber is over."

His voice took on pleading.

"Helen, Helen *darling!* We're engaged. We love each other. You can't—you can't marry *Burton*. The man's old enough to be your father. You can't love him."

"Why can't I?" she demanded. "He—he's able—brilliant——"

"Then a squirrel hoarding nuts against the winter is able and brilliant," he scoffed. "The man hasn't an instinct, a thought, about acquiring an extra dollar—or an extra girl," he added bitterly.

"I'm to marry him," she said.

"Which merely means that you set a higher price on yourself than the other women he's known, and

this time he was willing to meet the market," he sneered.

"You talk as though marriage were a matter of purchase and sale," she said.

"Well, what else is your marrying Burton?" he encountered. "You haven't said yet that you love him. And you can't say it. You can't look me in the eye and tell me that you love that old man."

"Don't be melodramatic, Larry, please. He's not old. Fifty, perhaps. And," she hesitated slightly, "I do love him."

"When did this great passion come to you?" he sneered. "Last night we were engaged. At least, yesterday afternoon we were. You loved me, then. At least, you *said* you did. I suppose that since you told me that you've told Burton the same thing." He shrugged, and the movement was an insult. "Having practiced on me, you were probably quite convincing to Burton."

"I think you'd better go," she said.

"It would have been better if I'd never come, if I'd never seen you," he said.

"Perhaps it would," she said.

"No, I don't think so. If you hadn't been engaged to me, Burton might not have offered the high price of marriage."

"Larry, must you talk to me as though I were a girl of the streets?" she asked.

"Why not? You're doing what street girls do. You're taking a man without loving him. You exact a better bargain than the street girl, but—that's all. Should I treat you with respect merely because of your business ability?"

All that softness, which had aroused protective tenderness in him in the past, was gone from her now. Voice, eyes, even her features, seemed hard. The blonde, doll-like prettiness which had entranced him seemed to vanish; in its place was a petulant greed.

"You might be respectful because of yourself, if not for me," she said.

He laughed at her, at himself.

"A man whose fiancée has sold herself to a richer man feels a great deal of self-respect, doesn't he? There's a lot can be spoken and written about good breeding, Helen. But when a woman does what you are doing, it takes more than good breeding for a man to hide his feelings. And why," he angrily demanded, "should *my* good breeding rise to an occasion which yours has failed to meet? You want me to act like a gentleman when you have failed to act like a lady."

He waved aside an incoherent interruption from her.

"I know—I'm being melodramatic again. But I'm no actor. I suppose that some day I'll laugh at this situation, give it the comic value it deserves, but just now—Helen, *how* can you do it?"

"Especially," she sneered, "when I could have a man like you."

His face that had been twisted by the violence of his emotion, became grave.

"That," he said, "isn't like you. Marrying Burton isn't like you, either, but—sneering at me—"

"You've sneered at me," she accused.

"But you—you're doing something that—I've done nothing to you. Why, Helen, you love me. You know you love me."

"I wish you'd go," she said. "Larry, we're getting nowhere. Because there's no place we *can* go. You and I—we've been good friends——"

"Friends?"

"Well—lovers, then," she conceded. "We've had delightful times. Why can't we have delightful memories?"

"We might share them with your husband," he jeered.

"Frank knows—all about you," she said. "He is—not jealous."

"Wonderful man," he derided. "When you accepted him last night, did you happen to tell him that I'd held you in my arms yesterday afternoon?"

"He is not the kind of a man to question," she said.

"Enough for him that he owns the frame," he scoffed. "Well, when he hangs you in the gallery, I wonder if he'll send away the other pictures."

"Your grievance, after all, Larry, is with me—not with him," she said. For the first time there was something of dignity in her attitude.

"I suppose so," he admitted. "Well, we'll leave him out of it. He does the best he can. Winning no gifts, he buys——"

"I won't have you—you mustn't say such things to me," she cried.

"I will say them. You mentioned the girls of the streets, Helen. I said you were a better bargainer than they. But that's the only way you're better. They—at least don't sacrifice love for money. *Money*. Why, Helen, what's Frank Burton's money to you? It isn't as though I were poor. I've plenty of money.

I'm rich, when you come right down to it. Suppose that Burton *has* twenty times as much as I have? I still have more than enough. Even a street girl, other things being equal, doesn't make her rivals put their fortunes on the tables for appraisal."

"You know a lot about them," she said.

"Oh, Helen—I'm only talking about the fundamental decencies."

"And in those fundamental decencies I'm less than—loose women. Well, go to them, then."

"Now you're being melodramatic," he charged.  
"Please, Helen——"

"I've tried to make you reasonable," she blazed. "I've told you that we were making a mistake, that I loved another man. You've insulted me and degraded yourself. You're too conceited to imagine that another man might be more attractive than your-self——"

"Helen! Please!"

She ignored his protest. "You've professed to love me. How many times have you assured me that I could do no wrong? And now, because I prefer another man——"

"Prefer his fortune," he interrupted.

"Now," she went on, "you compare me to vile women, say that I'm lower than they are, and—will you go?"

He stared at her. Anger did not make her pretty. There was a virago quality in her that he had never suspected. Still, he accused himself, no matter what she had done, she was the woman he loved. Across his memory flashed recollection of the first time he had seen her, of the wondering awe, the incredulity,

with which he had accepted her subtle intimations that he was not unpleasing to her.

Theirs had been love at first sight. At least, it had been so with him, and he had believed her timid confession that it had been likewise with her. This was no way to part with one who had been loved, who was still loved. He caught at shreds of courtesy.

"Helen," he said gently, "forgive me. I—I've been unforgivable, I know, but—it's been because I loved you."

"Love? What do you know of love?" she asked. "Love doesn't insult, doesn't sneer, doesn't condemn."

"I know it," he admitted. "And—I'm sorry, Helen."

"Sorry? After what you've said to me? And you want me to forgive you?"

"You just said yourself that we might have delightful memories," he said. "Let's—try to have them."

"I said that before you had said so much," she said. "Then," she sneered, "I was as good as a woman of the streets. Now I'm worse, and—I hate you."

"You can't say that," he protested.

"I have said it, and I do say it," she cried. "And if your street women are so much better than I—why don't you marry one of them?"

Shame that something lovely had been soiled had prompted his apology. But deeper than any sense of shame was the sense of outrage. This girl had taken from him the delicate fruits of first love and had tendered them back to him acid and rotten. He had shared with her his dream, his hopes, his high ambi-

tions; had been gay with her, thoughtful with her, ecstatic with her. She had a precious something from him that was meant for his wife, that was sacred.

And she had degraded it by placing upon it only a money value. He knew, with the clarity of disillusioned love, that she didn't care for Burton. He knew, with agony, that her sweet and shy surrenders to him had been sham. The hot resentment of youth burned more fiercely now than his love had burned a day ago.

"All right," he said, "I will. I'll marry the first girl that will have me."

"Go ahead," she jeered. "Do you imagine that it will make any conceivable difference to me?"

"Yes, I do," he cried. "Because—even if you are going to marry Burton, Helen, you're in love with me."

"After to-day?" She was completely mistress of herself now, and her smile was mocking. "Larry, I don't care what on earth you do; I don't care *whom* you marry or *if* you marry. I only want you to leave me now."

"I'm going," he said.

He turned abruptly from her. They had been sitting in the Wilson library, a long, low room, dedicated to music as well as to books, and the occasional rendezvous for bridge. He had never realized how long the room was, how interminable was the distance from the tea table to the door. He stumbled over a chair, caught his foot in a rug and almost slipped to the floor.

Somehow, he imagined that she was looking at him and finding him gauche, clumsy, without ability to meet and master a situation. He hated this, with all the quick, easily hurt vanity of youth. God knows

he had acted with no dignity during the scene just past, but he prayed for dignity now.

She had hurt him in every conceivable fashion. She had bruised his heart and seemed, somehow, to have humbled his brain. But she must not render contemptible his body, must not see him sprawl upon the floor. . . . He made the door, made it blindly, miserably. . . .

He felt strangely short of pride as he emerged from the house on Sixty-eighth Street. He had acted vulgarly, without chivalry, without decency. Helen, despite the incredibly mercenary thing she was doing, had come out of the situation better than he had. If she, too, had called names, it was only after he had done so, only after he had stripped pride from her.

But she managed to pick up the tattered remnants of pride and put them on again. Whereas he—how he hated her. If he could only hurt her as she had hurt him. . . . But how could he hurt her?

Was it possible that his love had so quickly turned to hate? He must dismiss the new emotion lest it rule him more powerfully than its predecessor had ever done. No, he wouldn't. He'd hug hate to him, hurt her. . . . The whole world knew that they had been engaged. Suppose he married—just to hurt her—the first girl that would have him. By God, he'd do that very thing.

## CHAPTER II

**H**E HAD said to her that she was still in love with him, but now, as he walked toward Fifth Avenue, he reviewed all their acquaintance. Strangely considering that they knew the same people, had always known them they had never met until two months ago. But his summers had been spent in travel that did not include the fashionable resorts which were her sole acquaintance with the world. In the winter, he'd been away at school, at college, and lately, had been engrossed in his law practice. They had reviewed affairs, and found that both of them had attended the same parties, but—well, there it was; they'd never met. New York was a big place, and one might never encounter one's dearest friend's next dearest friend.

How much fun it would have been, he had said to her, if they'd known each other from childhood, if he, at fifteen, could have taught her, at ten, to dive, to play tennis. . . . But, she reminded him, boys of fifteen scorned girls of ten. But he had known that the boy he had been would have braved juvenile teasing and devoted himself to the girl she must have been.

Still—and there had been silly and therefore delightful arguments—some of the novelty of acquaintance might have been worn off had they been childhood sweethearts. This way, meeting when she was

twenty-two and he twenty-seven, there was the unexplored past as well as the unexplored future to walk together. Not forgetting the wholly delectable present. . . .

He reached the Avenue, and became dully conscious that it was a warm spring day. Across the street were occasional benches where, in summer, idlers sat. He narrowly avoided a taxi, but hardly heard the raucous insults hurled at him by the driver. In his misery he would not have minded being instantly killed. What had he to live for, now that love had gone from him?

He saw nothing absurd in his attitude. He was by no means humorless, but disillusioned love is more easily laughed at in the forties than in the twenties.

Then, as he slumped down upon a bench, his mood changed again. He had much to live for. He had hate to cast a more fiery light for his way than ever love had cast.

She hadn't loved him. It had been all a pretense. Daughter of a widowed mother, dependent on a comparatively small income, she had feigned a passion that she never felt. Not his charm, not his own love for her, but his money—that had been the reason for her swift surrender.

It was too obvious. Love doesn't vanish between afternoon and evening. Yesterday afternoon she had loved him; last night, forgetful of her engagement to marry him, she had accepted Frank Wilson. As plain a case of barter and sale as had ever been placed before a jury. To the highest bidder. . . .

His threat that he would marry the first girl who'd have him had been uttered simply because, in his van-

ity, he believed that she still cared for him. But she'd never cared for *him*, had only loved his money, and had transferred her affections to a larger amount of money. He had meant security, comfort and luxury. But Frank Burton had meant colossal wealth, and that was all there was to it.

Then another angle obtruded into his mental vision. The world—their world, at any rate—knew of the engagement. It had been announced, and the wedding date had been set. That little world which seemed so important would know that Laurence Tracy had been jilted by Helen Wilson.

He sneered at this. He didn't have a cheap enough pride to be concerned at the pity or contempt of friends or strangers when his conscience was clear. But how Helen—he knew her better now in disillusionment than he had ever known her when love had rendered misty his vision of her—would writhe at the mockery of acquaintances, be that mockery ever so still.

To hurt her! To embarrass her! It wasn't worthy, this wish to hurt a woman, but what did he care about worthiness? If the woman he loved was utterly devoid of honor, then the whole world must be equally lacking in it and chivalry was an out-moded thing. By God, he would marry, marry instantly, and the world would think he had done the jilting and that Helen had accepted Burton as a second and desperate choice.

Along the sidewalk came a figure. It passed in front of Tracy, but he couldn't have told, so blinded was he by the rage of hurt pride, whether it was a man or a woman. But when the figure paused at the

far end of the bench and sat down, he turned and stared.

- A woman; a girl. Why on earth should she choose this particular spot to rest? Why couldn't she let him alone, let him have that complete solitude which he craved? Then he forgot her, as his mind went back to Helen, and to the incomprehensible revelation of her greed.

A slight movement from the girl at the other end of the bench interrupted his reverie. Damn her, why must she fidget? If she must disturb, by her presence, the thoughts of another person, why couldn't she keep quiet? He turned, with utter lack of rationality, to frown at her.

Something about her expression banished his frown. She was looking toward him, but he felt that she didn't see him. In her eyes was the strained, anxious expression, of one who is contemplating something so awesome that near surroundings mean nothing.

Involuntarily he turned and looked in the direction of her gaze. But beyond a jam in the motor traffic there was nothing to excite the slightest interest. He turned back to the girl, and now she met his glance. The faintest color showed in her cheeks and she averted her eyes.

Pretty thing. That is, she would be if she weren't so pale, so thin. Marvelous eyes, only the hollows beneath them lent her a gauntness that did not blend with the youthful grace of her figure. Carelessly, he eyed that figure. Immature—or maybe just thin. Her neck—damn it, the girl looked half starved.

Well, let her starve! As far as he was concerned, every woman in the world could starve.

But, at that, with decent clothes . . . The rundown heels of her shoes; the painfully-darned stockings; the shiny shabbiness of her blue serge suit . . .

Her body seemed suddenly to collapse inwardly, as a building, its supports withdrawn, might fall upon itself. Her hands fell upon her knees, and her shoulders rounded. Her lips—how pale they were—parted and that fixed gaze of hers now rooted itself upon the placid houses across the street.

Tracy looked uneasily about him. Policemen had little imagination, and might easily mistake him for the common type of masher. But there was no uniformed man nearer than the traffic jam some blocks away. He leaned toward the girl.

This was stark tragedy that he was witnessing. What might be the nature of the tragedy he could not imagine. But the quick impulsive generosity which was his most salient trait made him forget, for the moment, his hatred of her sex.

"I—beg pardon, but—are you ill?" he asked.

By an effort so painful that it hurt Tracy to watch her, she straightened her back and half-faced him. Her eyes, deepest black, blazed at him. It was almost, he thought, as though she hated him.

"Damn you," she said, "I'm hungry."

He gasped. Then, because in certain matters he was wise, he understood the profane preface to her confession. Too weak, too tired, to make pretense, pride made her hate herself for the admission and hate the person who had wrung it from her.

A moment ago, thinking she looked half starved, Tracy had mentally consigned her to unending famine. Now he reversed himself utterly. The words had

hardly left her lips when he was at the curb, signaling a taxi that had somehow escaped the jam farther uptown. The chauffeur swung into the curb.

For a moment Tracy thought the girl would refuse the offer of his arm. But pride had evidently been dying in her soul, and its last flare-up had been the "damn" which she had uttered.

Pathetically weak, she let Tracy assist her from the bench, across the sidewalk and into the taxi. The chauffeur eyed them with a mixture of suspicion and sympathy.

"Lady sick—or full of hop?" he asked.

"Starved," said Tracy simply.

If the chauffeur suspected one of those yellow-journal dragging affairs, if his mind turned to thoughts of white slavery, it might prove embarrassing for the girl. To his credit, Tracy gave no thought to possible embarrassment for himself.

"Goddamn it," gasped the driver. "Where to?"

"The nearest restaurant," said Tracy. "Not a big one—" He thought of the girl's possible uneasiness in a fashionable dining room.

"I gotcha, boss," said the taxi man.

He started the car before Tracy was settled beside the girl. She lay back limp, and the eyes she turned upon him had completely lost their blaze. They were listless, dull.

"Just a couple of minutes," said Tracy, "and you'll be all right."

She made no answer. There was no expression on her face to indicate that she heard him. Tracy felt a panicky fear that she'd die, die right in the taxi, on the way to the restaurant. But he told him-

self, people didn't die suddenly from starvation. They—good God, what a world! A world in which people could be hungry on Fifth Avenue. . . .

The taxi drew up before a smart little restaurant on a side street. Tracy would have preferred a lunch-room. The girl's condition would be less noticeable, less embarrassing to her. . . . But time was precious. He assisted her from the car and put his hand in his pocket.

The chauffeur waved away the bill.

"What the hell," he muttered, "if a dame's *hungry*, I guess I can give her a free ride. But say, boss, after the meal is over—well, do your huntin' where the game has some chance, hey?"

Tracy nodded. In the queer kinship which suffering arouses among its witnesses, there could be no resentment that a taxi man should teach him elementary principles of honor. He led the girl to the restaurant.

The maître d'hôtel met him at the dining room entrance. He greeted Tracy with that mixture of familiarity and servility which is the grand manner of his breed. He didn't know Tracy, but he recognized the type. He realized that here was one who did not deem his obligations satisfied when he tipped a mere waiter. Such a man as this left pleasant sums in the discreet palms of head waiters.

"A table—here, sir—quiet—"

That the girl was shabby meant nothing. This maître d'hôtel had seen many a girl, shabby one week, become bedecked with jewels the next, when her escort on the first occasion had happened to be of the Tracy type.

Something passed from Tracy to the obsequious palm. The maître d'hôtel was not guilty of the vulgarity of glancing at the denomination of the bill.

"Soup," said Tracy. "Consommé or a chicken broth. Whatever is ready. But quickly. Then chops —potatoes, a salad——"

"Immediately," said the maître d'hôtel.

Tracy detained him. "But first—some brandy. The lady is—not feeling well."

The young man underwent a close scrutiny. He passed it well. This was no prohibition enforcement official.

"Instantly, sir," was the reply.

Tracy sat down opposite the girl.

"Just one minute," he said.

She looked at him listlessly. She made no reply, and Tracy felt increasing embarrassment. It was though, somehow, he were guilty of the social order that caused young girls to go hungry. . . .

The waiter relieved the strain by his appearance with a tiny glass of brandy. He set it on the table and disappeared.

"Drink it," said Tracy.

The girl picked it up. Its fumes rose to her nostrils and they quivered ever so faintly. Then she set the glass down. She made as though to rise. Tracy touched her on the shoulder and her weakness made her fall back into her chair. But her pale mouth was stubborn.

"I won't—I can't," she moaned.

"Good God, drink it," said Tracy. Then he thought he understood. "Scuples about liquor?"

"About men," she replied. "I—I haven't any

money. I—don't know that I'll ever have money. I—won't pay—the way you expect."

Tracy stared at her. Anger, then contempt, then amusement were in his eyes.

"Are you so vain," he asked, "that you think I'd care a hoot for that sort of pay—from you?"

His psychology was sounder than he had dared hope. Her thinned blood was thickened enough with resentment at the insult to show in her cheeks.

"Now," she said, "you owe me something."

She raised the glass to her lips and sipped it slowly. As she put it down the waiter placed a bowl of soup on the table. He served her deftly. Again her nostrils dilated faintly. She glanced at Tracy. Her lips parted in the slightest of smiles.

"You even," she said, "owe me the soup."

"Let us hope," he said sardonically, "that you'll be sufficiently my creditor to eat a chop. Then I can think of some further rudeness which will justify your acceptance of a salad."

Then he busied himself lighting a cigarette. It was not pleasant, watching a famished girl eat her first mouthful since—when?

## CHAPTER III

THERE are human beings who achieve a perverted thrill by peeping. Some like to peep through windows and some into minds, but always in the hope of witnessing something discreditable. Tracy happened to be a gentleman, a breed so rare that one finds one's self explaining, sometimes—Heaven help our understanding—apologizing for them. Not that Tracy carried his gentility to the point that he forgot his natural humanity, that he could not harbor thoughts of revenge and treasure animosities. But he had an instinctive, poignant embarrassment at the humiliation of others, and this is perhaps as true a proof of good breeding as anything could be.

He put down his cigarette and lighted another. He crushed the burning end of that one upon a saucer and picked up the first. He put the wrong end in his mouth and smothered a profanity. The girl looked up from her soup.

"Lucky for you," she said, "that you inherited money."

He stared at her, surprised by her words into forgetfulness of embarrassment.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

She frowned at him. A spoonful of soup was on its way to her mouth. She swallowed it, and the thinness of her throat made painfully visible the articula-

tion of the muscles. The spoon went to the plate again. The trembling fingers caused the silver to clatter upon the china, and he looked away again. For a minute or two there was silence, except for the tiny sounds of liquid being scooped up from the plate.

Again he fidgeted and again he lighted an unnecessary cigarette. There had been in her eyes, when he met them, a light that was almost greedy. But that wasn't the word. Greed connoted a desire for unnecessary things, it evoked a picture of Helen Wilson. But this girl's eyes had merely expressed an incredulous belief in the existence of food. Tracy would have liked to hurt someone . . .

He remembered having read something of the technique of feeding starving people. One gave them a little at a time, lest their famished organs suffer more from repletion than from emptiness. He stole another glance at her.

She was holding herself in, he saw. Her impulse was to lift the plate to her mouth, drain it at one draft, but she was slowly, methodically, spooning it to her mouth. He looked away again.

"Thank you," she said.

He knew exactly what she meant. She was grateful that he did not witness more of her humiliation. What manner of girl was this, who in the most dreadful poverty could appreciate nuances of manners that he had only unconsciously observed?

Up to now he had only been sorry for her in a general way. She was typical of all the misery and poverty in the world. But suddenly she became capable of calling upon that specific pity and sorrow

which we reserve for individuals who had compelled our admiration.

Poor, humiliated thing! And why should she feel humiliated? People aren't humiliated because ignorance of the rules of right living results in ill health. People feel no shame because an accident has crippled them. Then why feel humiliation because of economic ignorance or misfortune? This world, he told himself, has a great deal of common sense yet to acquire.

Now the waiter appeared. If he felt slight surprise that Tracy ate nothing, or that Tracy's companion should order at five in the afternoon a meal that was more of a luncheon or dinner than a tea, he didn't show it. Perhaps the maître d'hôtel had intimated something about the transfer of largesse to him, or, more probably, the waiter was something of a psychologist himself, and anticipated a suitably gratifying reward for deft and incurious service.

"You may look at me now," said the girl.

Her voice had lost the quality of desperation. There was almost a touch of amusement in its tones. It was an assured voice, the voice of a girl accustomed to other things than the charity of a casual stranger. Tracy, looking up for the third time, met her eyes.

The agony, the horror, the desperation had left them. Oddly, he felt himself color. She had, in some intangible way, taken command of the situation, and the embarrassment that might have been hers had become almost wholly his.

The terrific repression which she had manifested as she attacked the soup was not so plainly visible now, although her fingers still trembled slightly as she manipulated the knife and fork.

She guessed at his embarrassment.

"You may talk to me," she said.

Tracy withheld his amusement at her grand manner. She was, he knew, fighting for self-control, and if her fractional victory showed itself by a something that absurdly hinted at condescension, he would admire rather than condemn.

"What did you mean by saying that I was lucky to have inherited money? How do you know I inherited money? And why should that have been luck?"

"Men so sensitive that they can't look at suffering are not the founders of great fortunes," she remarked dryly.

Tracy's eyes widened. The philosophy may not have been original with her, but that she could think it and apply it just now proved her remarkable.

"And you can't," she went on, "deny that the possession of money is good luck. Try its lack," she added.

For the first time she smiled. It was a pathetic, brave little smile that sat oddly on lips, Tracy unaccountably felt, which should only be curled in merriment.

"I have finished the chops," she said, "and I am waiting for a justification for eating your salad."

This was courage of the highest order. To make a jest of one's misery may be only a gesture, but decent pride is the mother of that gesture, and serene honesty is its usual sire. Tracy thought of Helen Wilson, who had been capable of degradation for the difference between a couple of million and fifty. This girl would not surrender her soul for any price.

"I like," he said, "very short women."

And now pathos momentarily left her lips, and they hinted of that gayety which was, he thought, their natural birthright.

"Is that the best you can do by way of insult? It seems to me hardly fitting, but—I think it must serve."

"I shall try to think up something to justify a dessert," he said.

She shook her head, and the movement rippled her short black hair. It was well-kept hair, Tracy decided. For that matter, despite her shabbiness, there was an almost tragic neatness about her. Her nails, her hands . . .

"I am not in a cage," she suddenly blazed.

"I didn't mean to stare," he quickly apologized.

"And I didn't mean to lose my temper." She met him more than halfway. "And I don't want dessert, but—coffee?"

"Won't my liking for short women do for the coffee?" he asked.

For the first time since boyhood he felt tears close to his eyes. Heaven knew that he liked light badinage, but the circumstances . . . her starvation, her poverty, her incredible bravery.

"If," she said, "your imagination is so poor—well, we'll let my ungainly height serve."

"It isn't ungainly," he said swiftly. "Why—you're exactly right." He leaned eagerly across the table. "Why—I think you—you're wonderful. You're the bravest—" He paused a moment. "You're beautiful," he blurted out.

She was. At least, in that slim body, in those lovely eyes and sweet lips and straight proud nose, were all

the elements of beauty. All she needed was care, rest, decent food, lack of worry. He hadn't noticed it before. Somehow, it would have been a mockery to have been aware of her charm when she was starving. But now he was aware of it, and a too-patent admiration showed in his eyes.

She pushed back her chair.

"You haven't had your coffee," he said.

"I could always have coffee if I cared to be told that I'm pretty," she said. "Well," and she sighed faintly, "you did very well."

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean that you didn't pay the kind of compliments that your kind of man pays to my kind of women right at the start. But now——"

"Pride," he interrupted her, "is admirable, until it becomes conceit. Are you so vain that you mistake honest admiration for admirable traits for a way of —of approach?"

"I'm sorry," she said. "Please—may I have coffee—and a cigarette?"

She was one of those rare people whose apologies carry them more than a formal acknowledgment of the demands of a situation and are so convincing that the burden shifts to their recipients. A certain tender and eager unwillingness to hurt was in her voice.

Tracy offered her his cigarette case. She took one, accepted the light he offered and inhaled the smoke. She smoked as he liked to see a woman smoke. It was not a pretty accomplishment that aped masculinity. It was an appreciation of the good things of life. She drank her coffee, too, as though she understood that coffee at the conclusion of a repast was not

a beverage, but something designed to balance perfectly a culinary architectural design.

The waiter, removing the dishes, still hovered near. Doubtless the man wanted to be gone, to snatch those few hours of leisure granted to waiters. Tracy paid the check and tipped him generously.

Once again the girl started to rise. She held a slim hand out to Tracy. He ignored it.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

That sudden anger shone again in her eyes.

"If I were—of your class," she said, "you would not make inquiries. You would not think that the purchase of a meal did more than render you under an obligation."

"And if you," he said, "were not so suspicious——"

"Do you think I have reason to be anything else?" she demanded.

"I know nothing of your reason. I'm not going to ask about them," he told her. "I simply want to know what you are going to do."

"Is it your affair?" she asked.

"It certainly is," he replied. "If a ship picked up a shipwrecked sailor, he isn't fed and cast into the sea again."

"I can swim now," she said.

"How far?" he inquired. "Why," he went on brutally, "you'll be hungry again in the morning—to-night, probably. You can't be famished for days——"

"Weeks," she interposed dryly.

"And recover with one meal," he continued. "Why—I don't believe you have any place to sleep to-night."

"So," she said quietly, "you are going to offer to remedy that lack——"

"I haven't insulted you," he cried. "Why should you insult me? You—you owe me something."

"I know," she said wearily, "that you would shortly present your bill."

"You make me," he said angrily, "want to—to strike you. I—I mean that—I can't let you leave me in the condition—why, you're barely able to stand."

It was true, and even as she started to deny the fact, she caught at the table edge and sank down into the chair from which she had risen.

"I said you owed me something, and you do," he went on. "You can't assist a drowning person half-way out of the water and then let him fall back."

"I'm a her, not a him," she said.

"What difference does that make?" he cried. "You permit me to aid you momentarily, but refuse to accept an aid that means something. If I—did nothing for you—I'd not be able to sleep."

"And that," she mocked, "would bring lines to your forehead, would gray your hair——"

"Have you any place to go when you leave here?" he asked.

"Well?" she evaded.

"You have no money. You have—my God, if you haven't a place to sleep, then you can't have any clothes beyond what you're wearing——"

"So you'll see that I have a bed, food, clothes—thank you, but I'm not having any."

"What a rotten, dirty mind you have," he said.

Her eyes lighted with anger. Tracy had never known that black eyes could hold fiery glints.

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

"I mean that you must have perfectly filthy thoughts, or you wouldn't be so quick——"

She laughed aloud, and in her laugh was an anguish, a self-mockery so poignant that for a moment he feared she would become hysterical.

"I have filthy thoughts?" she said. "I have a rotten mind? Well, my dear man, where do you suppose I acquired those thoughts and that mind? Who gave them to me, do you think? The men that——"

"Why blame me for what other men may have said or done?" he interrupted.

She appraised him. Never in his life had Tracy been subjected to a scrutiny as searching as this girl gave him now. It was not merely his features that she examined; he felt, eerily that she was looking into his mind, into his very heart.

Then she nodded, as though she had come to a decision.

"You want to help me?" Her words were more of a statement than a question.

"Of course," he said.

"Then you may. What do you want to do for me?"

"I want to give—lend——"

"Call it give," she interrupted. "I shall never, save under the most fortunate circumstances, be able to repay you."

"All right, then, I want to give you money enough to—tide you over——"

"A hundred? A thousand? Ten thousand?" she inquired. The subtle mockery of her voice made him redden.

"Whatever," he said stiffly, "you choose to ask."

"Even to the half of my fortune?" she quoted. Her

cynicism was revelatory, not of herself, but of those whom she had met. "Very well, I'll let you give me five hundred dollars. On the absolute condition," she added, "that you agree never to make any attempt to meet me, to know me, to see me. What about it?"

He stared at her. Somehow, this continuance of distrust hurt more than it angered him.

"Very well," he said.

From his pocket he drew a roll of bills.

"You carry that much money with you?" she asked.

He smiled wryly. It happened that he had intended buying Helen an antique bracelet to-day, a bracelet that she had admired.

"I do—sometimes," he said.

He handed her a packet of bills.

"You'll keep your word?" she asked.

Despite his pity, he could not keep a sneer from his voice.

"You rate yourself too highly," he said.

"I deserve that," she answered.

Into a tiny hand bag, as shabby as the clothing she wore, she stuffed the bills. Then she held out her hand.

"Good-by," she said.

"Good-by," he said stiffly.

She turned from him, reeled slightly, and he was just in time to catch her as she fainted.

## CHAPTER IV

**D**ISMAY fought with pity in Tracy's heart. The unconscious girl, whose starvation he had just allayed by the purchase of a meal, whose immediate future he had rendered fairly secure by the gift of five hundred dollars, aroused his pity, but the fact that he held her in his arms aroused dismay.

Thank Heaven, this little restaurant, while smart enough at luncheon and dinner, had no tea patronage. Save for an idle waiter or so, it was deserted. But still, to have it told all over town—for all he knew he had been recognized . . . Then he cursed himself for a snob.

How light she was! For a girl of her more than average height she weighed almost nothing. All traces of the snobbery-inspired dismay were gone now. She couldn't weigh much over a hundred pounds, and she ought to weigh twenty-five pounds more. Somehow or other this fact made her starvation more dreadful.

A waiter was by his side now, consternation visible on his expressive Gallic countenance. Mademoiselle had died? But no—it was a faint. Oh, well, women were like that. The waiter's wife, for example, had been known to faint at the so-unimportant bite of a mosquito. Mademoiselle, perhaps—

"For God's sake do something," said Tracy. "Get me some brandy—quick."

There was a cushioned bench along one wall, where

when the restaurant was crowded, patrons sat in discomfort assuaged by the fact that they were dining in a haunt of fashion. Upon this narrow couch Tracy laid the girl. He felt a queer regret as he relinquished his burden. Although she was in his arms through no volition of her own, her helplessness aroused something that was more than protective. He stared down at her. Nowadays women wore no corsets to be released. . . .

The waiter arrived with brandy, and also with a maid from the coatroom, who knelt beside the girl, chafed her hands, touched her temples with the cognac. Beneath her ministrations the girl sighed, opened her eyes. Her lips rejected the liquor, and Tracy wiped her chin with his handkerchief. She did not acknowledge the service even by a flicker of her lashes. Her eyes closed again.

"The lady is ill," said the maid.

"I knew that myself," retorted Tracy savagely.  
"But can't you do something?"

"She should be home—in bed—with her doctor," said the maid.

Blankly Tracy stared at her.

"Of course," he said, "immediately—"

His voice died away as he looked at his guest. Home? She had no home. Why, the poor thing owned the clothes she stood in—rather, lay in—and nothing else besides.

"Shall I get a taxi?" asked the maid.

"Why—yes," he replied uncertainly.

He clutched at the maid's shoulder as the woman turned away.

"She—she isn't going to—die, is she?" he asked.

"I don't know—I wouldn't think so—looks to me as though she's just played out. The poor thing," she added impulsively.

The impulse made her richer by exactly ten dollars.

"Thanks," she said. "I'll get that taxi. If you'll carry her——"

"Do—do you think we'd better get a doctor first?" he asked.

The girl on the bench answered him, not by words, but by actions. She stirred, moaned faintly, and opened her eyes. She sat up and as she looked at Tracy recognition stirred in her eyes. Also bravery was there.

"All right—now," she whispered.

Then, in instant negation of her boast, her head fell loosely back, and she would have rolled to the floor but that Tracy caught her.

"Sorry," she managed to gasp.

She had not fainted this time, and by an effort she reassured him.

"Won't faint—again," she murmured.

But he did not release her. Instead, he lifted her from the floor, and her complete relaxation was sufficient indication of her utter weakness.

The maid called to him from the restaurant entrance.

"The taxi's here."

In various doors that probably led to pantries and kitchens, appeared faces. A buzz of speculation reached Tracy's ears as he carried the girl out, and his face burned. He hated to be conspicuous, and he felt a momentary anger toward the girl who had made him so.

Then he felt contempt for himself. What right had he to feel embarrassment because he played a part in tragedy? What was his wounded vanity as compared to the torments this girl had suffered?

"Where to, boss?" asked the taxi man.

Tracy hadn't thought of that. Vaguely he had decided that some hospital . . . What explanation could he make to the hospital attachés? Not, he told himself, that he would be embarrassed at his inability to tell anything about the girl, but she—she'd die if a whole hospital staff knew that she was suffering from the effects of insufficient nourishment.

Her blazing pride had assured him that. The fact that she had accepted money from him made no difference. Her humiliation . . . She wasn't dying. She was stirring in his arms now, nestling like a child, almost, seeking a greater comfort in another position.

He had saved her, when he took her from the Avenue bench, from death, perhaps. Gifts bestowed bring greater obligations to the donor than to the recipient. What had he said to her? That one couldn't half save a drowning person. He had saved her life, perhaps, but she had sacrificed—nearly—that life to her pride. She could have begged and avoided starvation, but she had chosen not to. Could he, having saved her life, refuse to save her pride?

He gave the taxi man the address of his own home. Then, ever so gently, he deposited his burden in the taxi and sat beside her. She was still too weak to sit erect. His arm went around her, and with a sigh she leaned against him, surrendering herself to his embrace as completely as when he had carried her from the restaurant.

He thanked Heaven that no sufficiently attractive offer had been made for his old-fashioned house on East Thirty-eighth Street, just off Park Avenue. It had been in the market for a year, because he had decided that a bachelor didn't need a whole house. But now he was glad that there was no apartment house lobby, with its uniformed gossiping attendants, its other tenants, to wonder at his extraordinary procedure. For it was extraordinary to bring to one's home a strange girl, especially a girl in the condition of this one.

But—where else could he take her? The hospital, out of consideration for her pride, was out of the question. She had no home of her own. He had no woman friend who, moved by his appeal or her own charity, would take the girl into her house. Once—and his lips curled sardonically—he would have been fool enough to have thought Helen would have received his pitiful guest, but even if, by some miracle, they were reconciled, he would know better than to approach Helen.

It took, in this late afternoon heavy traffic, nearly a quarter of an hour, to make the trip down town, and during the journey the girl never spoke. And when the machine drew up before the door of his house, he saw that she was asleep.

The chauffeur eyed him as doubtfully as had that other man who had conveyed them from the Avenue bench to the restaurant.

"Lady sick?" he asked.

"Obviously," Tracy replied.

The man looked at the girl as Tracy lifted her gently through the door of the machine, and then eyed

Tracy closely. The shrug of his shoulder that followed his scrutiny of the young man was as high a compliment as had ever been paid Tracy. It meant that while it was funny business, still it was none of the taxi man's and further, the young lad looked O. K. So the taxi man said, late that evening, to his wife.

Across the sidewalk, up the four steps to the door, Tracy carried the sleeping girl. He dared not put her down while he fished in his pocket for the key, so he twisted until his thumb was against the bell button. Almost instantly, Hogan, Tracy's butler, answered the ring.

On the sidewalk, attracted by the unusual sight of a young man carrying an apparently unconscious girl up a flight of steps, stood half a dozen people, sating their curiosity by stares. Hogan was as amazed—much more so—than the street spectators, but his dignity enabled him to overcome surprise. Further, it annoyed Hogan that the rabble—his usual description of people who did not know his master—should stare at a Tracy, no matter what a Tracy did. He had worked for Tracy's father, and forty years of service in one family is apt to result in an estimation of that family's importance which exaggerates fact.

"Get Dr. Blanchard on the phone, Hogan," said Tracy. "Then bring—damn it, I don't know what to give her."

"Brandy," suggested Hogan.

"She's had that," said Tracy. "Oh, bring water——"

"But she's not fainted; she's asleep, isn't she?" asked Hogan.

"Yes—at least I guess so—get the doctor," snapped his employer.

Hogan disappeared into a closet beneath the stairs that led from the surprisingly wide front hall to the upper floors, while Tracy carried his burden into a large room that once had been a parlor, later did duty as a drawing-room, and that finally was a comfortable library. In it remained, even through its drawing-room period, an extremely broad and comfortable old couch, and upon this Tracy deposited the girl.

He sighed with unconscious relief. Fifteen minutes of cramped position made his muscles ache. He revised his earlier estimate of her weight; she was heavier than he had thought, although he still conceded that she must be fearfully underweight.

Her lashes were black, black as her eyes, he noted. Her hat had fallen off as he carried her to the couch, and her black hair was pushed back from a low broad forehead. An intelligent face, as well as one that might be lovely, he silently commented. The straight nose and the rounded chin whose delicacy indicated no weakness, bore out the impression of mentality. A damn shame, he told himself.

Hogan appeared at the door. He was on tiptoe and he whispered.

"Dr. Blanchard's on the phone," he said.

Tracy, unconsciously imitating the butler's caution, also tiptoed. In the under-stairs closet he picked up the receiver.

"That you, Jimmy?" he asked.

"What's this tale of Hogan's?" demanded the doctor's voice. "Has Manhattan's only servant with a record of more than four months in any one house

finally taken to drink? He says that there's a girl——”

“Come right over, Jimmy, will you, please?” pleaded Tracy.

“Accident?” asked the physician.

“Starvation,” said Tracy.

The doctor whistled. “Be over in a jiffy,” he promised.

He kept his word; in less than five minutes he had rung the front bell, and in another moment he was bending over the girl. The touch of his fingers on her pulse awakened her. Her eyes fastened, with an odd disinterest, upon the kindly features of the physician.

“Don't be frightened,” he said. “I'm just Larry Tracy's doctor.”

“Larry Tracy?”

“You're in his house,” said the doctor.

“Oh,” she said. She started to rise.

Gently the physician pushed her back. “You're in my hands, young woman,” he said, with mock severity. “And when I give orders I intend them to be obeyed. Now let's look at your tongue. . . .”

Tracy withdrew from the room. It was fully fifteen minutes before Dr. Blanchard joined him in the hall.

“Why in hell,” demanded the doctor, “did you feed a starving girl chops?”

“How do I know what to feed a starving girl?” countered Tracy. “Anyway, she ate very little—showed remarkable restraint, and——”

“Stubborn brat,” said the physician. “Won't go to a hospital——”

"She isn't stubborn." Tracy rallied to the defense of his guest. "Has a decent pride, that's A 1."

"Well, proud or stubborn doesn't matter," said Blanchard. "I gave her a little something, and she'll be asleep in a moment, and we'll send for an ambulance——"

"We will not," said Tracy.

"Why won't we?" asked the doctor surprisedly.

Tracy floundered. "I know—just from talking to her—that she'd not go to a hospital—and she—trusted herself to me—I won't double-cross her."

"Well, where's her home?"

"I don't know—she hasn't any," replied Tracy.

"Hasn't any? Hell's bells, she must have a place to sleep," cried Blanchard.

"She didn't have a place to eat," commented Tracy dryly.

Blanchard pursed his lips.

"Well, what on earth are we to do with her, then?"

"Is she very ill?" asked Tracy.

Blanchard shook his head. "Needs a careful diet, that's all. But she's been through some dreadful experiences—I don't mean just starvation, though God knows that's bad enough. But—some sort of shock. May come out of it in a couple of days and—may not. That all depends on how she looks at life when she wakes up."

"All the more reason she shouldn't go to a hospital," declared Tracy.

"You might be right. Well, the young woman's evidently flat broke. She can't very well take a suite at the Ritz with a private nurse."

"She can," said Tracy. "I mean she could—I'd pay—but she wouldn't take it."

"She evidently, from what I gathered from her, took a meal from you," said the doctor.

"And five hundred in cash," said Tracy. "But still, I don't think she'd take more—"

Blanchard grinned with the disillusionment of the physician.

"Once start 'em taking and there's no finish. Well, hell's bells, something's got to be done about her. The poor child ought to be in bed now. Let me send for an ambulance—"

"Couldn't she go in an ordinary car?" asked Tracy.

The physician shrugged. "When people collapse—after a period of starvation, and have also experienced some shock or other—the girl's *suffered*, I tell you—an ambulance is best."

"If she's that ill, she stays here," declared Tracy. He hadn't intended to say anything like that at all. But once it was said, he knew he'd stick to it. Damn it, a sensitive girl, one that had skirted the edge of death rather than apply to some charitable organization, deserved a break, and he'd see that she got it.

"Here?" Blanchard stared at Tracy. He knew his friend intimately, would have sworn that in the years of his bachelorhood Tracy had brought no other woman to his house, save with the most correct of chaperonage.

"You can't do a thing like that," he stated.

"Why can't I?" parried Tracy.

"Well, people—why, old man, for the girl's sake. Her friends—she's not—doesn't *seem* to be a chippie. Her reputation—"

"Oh, my God, don't make me laugh," exclaimed Tracy. "Her friends? She couldn't have told many of them that she was starving. As for her reputation, if I judge her right, she'd rather lose her reputation than her pride, if you get what I mean."

"I get it," said Blanchard. "But—your own reputation."

"Can take care of itself," said Tracy.

"Can it? Hasn't someone else a right to—er—demand that your reputation is good?"

"You mean Helen?" asked Tracy.

Blanchard laughed aloud.

"I've been wondering, my Bayard, my chivalrous knight errant, when, anxious to do your devoir for a lady in distress, your quixotic mind would turn to thoughts of Helen Wilson. A sweet girl, I grant you, but—if you don't mind my saying so, one not too liberal of mind where—er—knight errantries are concerned. I hate to say it about my best pal's fiancée, but she'll raise hell when she hears of this, Larry."

"No," Tracy smiled cynically, "I don't think so. You see, Jimmy, she's going to marry Frank Burton. And—and—don't hand me any sympathy. I—I don't care a damn, Jimmy. And if that isn't chivalrous, well—neither was she."

Blanchard looked at him. Then he turned into the library.

"Help me carry her upstairs," he said.

Tracy pushed past him.

"I can carry her myself," he said.

He picked up the girl and walked upstairs with her. He placed her in the center of his own huge bed.

"Call up my office and tell my secretary that I want

her to get hold of Nurse Evans," said Blanchard.

Tracy picked up the telephone by the bed.

"No, telephone from downstairs," said the doctor.

"Why?" demanded Tracy.

"Because you're not a woman, and this girl must be undressed and put to bed, and a doctor can do what a layman cannot."

"Oh," said Tracy, retreating from the room.

## CHAPTER V

HOGAN was lingering in the hall when Tracy came downstairs. He eyed his master curiously.

"I could get my niece's daughter, Nora White, sir," he suggested.

Tracy stared at him.

"To look after the young lady, sir," explained Hogan.

"I'm going to get a nurse," said Tracy shortly.

"But a nurse won't take care of her clothing, sir," persisted the butler.

Tracy laughed. "Clothing? I don't think she needs a maid for that."

He moved toward the closet under the stairs, but Hogan kept step with him.

"Then she'll need to send for some, sir, and maybe the nurse can't leave her."

"While she's in bed," said Tracy, "what will she need?"

"Nightgowns, sir, and powder and rouge and toilet articles——"

Tracy laughed. "Hogan, what do you know of these matters? Have you, all these years, been leading a double life? No, you can't have been. Or else you'd know the girls wear pajamas now."

"I think it would be—nice, sir, if the young lady

woke up to find that—well, all the things a lady ought to have she has."

"You're perfectly right, Hogan," said Tracy.  
"Send for Nora."

"I have, sir," said Hogan.

Tracy grinned as he entered the closet. Why did he ever bother to debate matters with his butler? Hogan always won all arguments, and frequently by the simple expedient—as now—of doing in advance what he later asked permission to do.

He got Blanchard's secretary on the wire and transmitted to her the physician's order. Then he sat down in the library to await Blanchard's descent from the upper floor.

It was not long delayed. In a few minutes he heard the doctor's footsteps on the stairs and advanced to meet him.

"Get my office?" he asked.

Tracy nodded.

"How is she?" he asked.

Blanchard shrugged. "She's asleep this minute, but—a doctor can often tell what physical reactions will be, my lad, but—mental?" He shrugged again. "That's another matter."

"You mean that her mind——"

"Certainly not. Not in the usual sense, that is. But a terrific depression sometimes follows long-sustained suffering, and—I know she can rally from the effects of starvation, but whether or not she can quickly recover from the effects of other matters—bruised pride, humiliation—I am afraid you've a long-staying visitor, Larry, my lad."

He entered the library and sat down.

"Got a minute to spare before I dash over to my next patient," he said. "Tell me about it."

Tracy told him, beginning the tale with the statement that he was sitting on a bench on the Avenue. Blanchard heard him through without interruption. Then he asked a question.

"Didn't try to pick you up, did she?"

Tracy grimaced with disgust. "Lord, no. She's not that kind."

"I wouldn't think so," agreed Blanchard. "Pretty little trick. Might be more than that with a few square meals in her tummy. But say, young feller, what were you doing sitting on a bench by the Park?"

Tracy crimsoned. "Not lying in wait for any defenseless girl, Jimmy."

"Nobody said you were," retorted Blanchard. "But—you say—stop me if I hurt—that you and Helen——"

"It hurts," said Tracy.

"Sorry," said Blanchard. He hesitated a moment. "Well, there's a remedy upstairs for a bruised heart."

"I don't get you," said Tracy stiffly.

"Oh, yes, you do," said the doctor.

"Then I prefer not to understand you," said Tracy. Blanchard laughed. "Which is a highly commendable attitude, by boy, only—take the tip."

"What do you mean?" demanded Tracy.

Blanchard hoisted himself from the chair in which he had reposed his bulky form.

"Mean? Nothing original, old top. But many a heart—on the rebound——"

"Don't be an ass," said Tracy.

"I'm asking you not to be one. You'd got off to a good start, you know."

"You mean that I should have—let her starve?"

"I mean that you'll be hungry for—affection, and—don't let her feed you in return for what you did for her."

"I'd hardly bring a presumptive mistress to my own home," said Tracy.

"What a long tail our cat has," chuckled Blanchard. "Well, forgive your medical man for usurping the privileges of your spiritual adviser—you have a spiritual adviser, haven't you, old man?"

"Go to hell," said Tracy.

"I just about am," replied Blanchard. "I'm calling on Mrs. Salborn, and she makes each professional call an excuse to talk prohibition and kindred evils—say, look in on the young lady occasionally until Miss Evans arrives, will you?"

"And if she needs anything——"

"Don't give it to her. Beyond a glass of water. But I think she'll stay asleep for a few hours. I'll be around first thing in the morning, unless Miss Evans sends for me before then. So long, my rescuer of damsels in distress."

He was out of the house before Tracy could think of any suitably crushing retort. He sat down and smoked a cigarette. Despite the good-humored note on which Blanchard had departed, and despite the certainty of his friendship and his consequent unwillingness to say too much, it was obvious that Blanchard thought he had done a—well—a foolish thing. Bringing a strange woman into a bachelor home—well, it wasn't done, Tracy conceded to himself.

Then defending himself, he grew indignant at the social order. Why shouldn't it be done? Was charity, ordinary humanity, so hemmed in by silly Puritanical regulations that the soul of it must be burned away before it could be applied? Damn the foul-minded people who could only put their own filthy constructions on every decently impulsive action.

Then he smiled at himself. He was angry before accusation had even been whispered. Time enough to wax eloquent when offense had been given him. Meanwhile, Dr. Blanchard had told him to look in upon his guest and see that she was all right.

He went quietly upstairs and found Hogan in the upper hall.

"I thought," said the butler, "while I was waiting for Nora, maybe the lady might call."

"Right," said his master. "I'll look in on her."

He opened the door and peered into the room. There, apparently asleep, in the middle of his wide bed, lay his guest. Tracy turned back to nod to Hogan a reassurance. But Hogan had gone, and Tracy knew why he had departed. The butler would not indicate to his master that he thought Tracy needed any espionage.

Upon a chair, where Blanchard had hastily thrown them, were the clothes of the girl. Tracy, advancing into the room, noted the shiny, worn fabric of her suit. Then, glancing down, he saw the cracked shoes with their twisted, run-down heels. Nor could he avoid noting the innumerable darned places in the stockings. A pair of bloomers and a silken garment that he denominated, with masculine clumsiness of verbiage, a shirt, were also patched.

With an impulsive movement he gathered all her apparel up. It was too bad that any woman, even a trained nurse, should be permitted to see these evidences of poverty. He shrewdly knew that a woman would suffer less in her pride if a man knew of the extremities to which she had been reduced than if another woman were aware of her need. Of course, she would realize, when Miss Evans arrived, that the nurse knew the occasion of her condition, but it needn't be made worse by the nurse seeing these pathetic garments.

He would take them to a guest bedroom. . . . By Jove, he'd have to sleep in a guest room himself. And by and by he'd have to transfer, or let Hogan's Nora transfer, pajamas, underwear, suits of clothes . . . but just now he'd take her clothing away with him. He had reached the door when her voice stopped him.

"What," it demanded, "are you doing with my clothing?"

He turned guiltily.

"Why—er—well, you won't want it right away," he said.

Her voice, incredibly, was amused.

"Still—I don't like the idea of a third nakedness. Naked we enter the world and naked we leave it——"

"Go to sleep," he interrupted. "Dr. Blanchard—"

"Is that his name? And yours is Tracy, Larry Tracy?"

"Yes," he said.

She read the question on the tip of his tongue.

"Mine's Carroll," she said. "Joyce Carroll. You

—you could have found it out by looking in my hand bag."

"I'd hardly do that," he said stiffly.

"Do you—think you are—quite real?" she inquired.

"Real?" he echoed.

"You almost convince me you're a gentleman," she said. He could sense the effort she made to put lightness into her tired voice. "Of course—you can't be—there isn't such a thing, but—what are you doing with my clothes?"

"I—er—thought that——"

"You didn't want the nurse—there's to be a nurse, isn't there? You didn't want her to know how low I'd fallen."

"What's low about being—poor?" he demanded.

"You don't know," she replied. "No one does—until they've tried it."

"Well," he said clumsily, "you're all right now——"

"I was hungry and ye fed me; I was shelterless and ye housed me; now I'm naked, and—I don't believe that's the Biblical quotation, but——"

"You mustn't talk," he said.

She ignored him.

"I'm sorry," she said. "After you'd fed me and given me money—I should have been able to do without fainting, shouldn't I? And," her pale lips curled deliciously, "after all my virtuous boasts—I'm in your bed."

"Don't," he said. Her self-cynicism shocked and hurt him.

"Why not? I might as well face facts. Too proud to confess to the world that I'm a pauper, it salves my pride to confess it to an individual, to accept from him

a charity that I'm not decent enough to accept from some organization."

"Don't talk about charity," he said. "You—you'll get on your feet, repay me—"

"How?" she asked. "There's only one way that girls in my position can repay men in yours, and—"

"You almost make me sorry that I helped you," he interrupted.

She smiled faintly. "You know, of course, that I'm not here, and neither are you. This is just the dream that comes before the end—" She touched her throat. The pajamas which Blanchard had placed upon her had become unfastened and her efforts to button them were pathetic. She gave up the task.

"Funny how we cling to remnants of modesty," she said. "I—try to hide my throat merely because I'm in bed. On the street I expose it, but here—and so silly. After all, this is your bed and these are your pajamas, and my throat—"

"It was the doctor who put you to bed," he said. "I was not here."

"Do you," she asked, "always know exactly the right thing to say?"

"Do you ever," he scolded, "know the right thing to do when the right thing is said? Go to sleep."

He turned his back on her and walked determinedly to the door. On the threshold he looked back. Her head had burrowed into a pillow and her eyes were closed. One arm was outside the coverlet, and the pajama sleeve had fallen back, and he could see that, though thin, it was shapely.

He walked swiftly from the room, closing the door gently. In that guest room which he decided to oc-

cupy himself, he placed her pathetic garments, stuffing them into an empty dresser drawer. To-morrow he'd send Hogan's niece—no, he'd go himself to a department store . . . Well, there was no hurry. . . . Poor, brave—*lovely* girl.

Hogan knocked on the door.

"The nurse has arrived, sir," he said. "And my niece has come, too. They're both with the young lady now."

"Very good," said Tracy. "I—I'll sleep here to-night, Hogan. Your niece can bring some things here from my room."

"Yes, sir," said Hogan. He hesitated a moment. "You'll be dressing soon, sir?"

Tracy shook his head.

"I won't bother to to-night, Hogan."

"But Miss Wilson and her mother, sir," Hogan reminded him. "You were having them here, early, because you were going on to the theater——"

"Oh," said Tracy blankly. In the great catastrophe that the breaking of his engagement had been, minor details of the cataclysm had been forgotten.

"The ladies won't be here, Hogan."

"Very well, sir," said Hogan. "I'll reset the table, sir."

"Er—Miss Wilson and her mother—they won't ever be here again, Hogan," said Tracy.

Between these two, servant and master, existed something more than the paying and receiving of wages. Before Tracy was born, Hogan had been a devoted follower of the Tracy fortunes. A real affection existed between them, the more binding

because they rarely stepped out of their respective positions.

But now Hogan did.

"Perhaps, sir," and he jerked a thumb toward the room from which Tracy had been ousted, "it's as well just now."

He permitted himself the luxury of a smile. It was not a smile that insinuated anything. It was more of a grin of amusement, and it vanished almost instantly. Tracy, who had not felt like smiling since he had received his *congé* from Helen, felt his lips quiver slightly. God knows he had adored Helen, but—Blanchard had been right. Helen would have this affair not too easy to understand. Then his mouth hardened. It was easy to understand *her*, he inwardly sneered.

Hogan, having ventured momentarily over that line into territory wherein he rarely trespassed, sped back to safety.

"Do you wish anything now, sir?" he asked.

"Nothing, thank you," replied Tracy.

Hogan left the room, and Tracy, finding his thoughts uncompanionable, descended to the ground floor. The evening papers were in the library, and he was deep in the sporting columns when he heard the front doorbell ring.

It rang again, insistently, and Tracy, with an exclamation of irritation, rose to answer it. Hogan was getting old and deaf, and unless he happened to be right in the hall, visitors might stand several minutes on the steps outside. Probably, though, he was helping Nora transfer his master's clothing to the guest room.

He walked into the hall and opened the door. An alert, pleasant-faced youth greeted him.

"Mr. Laurence Tracy?"

"Yes," admitted the owner of the name.

"I'm from the *Argus*. Mrs. Genevieve Wilson has sent a notice to our paper that the engagement between her daughter and yourself had been mutually dissolved. The *Argus* would like a statement from you."

"I have nothing to say," said Tracy. He gently but firmly closed the door.

## CHAPTER VI

**H**E HAD a great deal to say, but not the sort of thing one could utter to a newspaperman, or, for that matter, to anyone. There are thoughts which one must keep to one's self, for the outward observance of chivalry cannot be abandoned.

Quietly, but profusely, he damned Mrs. Genevieve Wilson. But finally, the first flush of anger gone, he reviewed the matter shamefacedly. When he inwardly denounced her mother, he was really denouncing Helen, and what reason had he for denunciation because their dissolved engagement had been made public?

The dissolution could not be kept secret. Why should it be? Not to let their world know that the engagement had been broken would be to be guilty of a meaningless, profitless deception. Still—and he grew angry again—she might have waited a day or so.

Mother and daughter, he told himself, were acting about the dissolution of the engagement as they had acted when the arrangement had been entered into. He had wanted to keep their love a secret for a while. There had seemed—how naïf he had been—a certain sacredness about it that would be lost, or at any rate lessened, by taking the world into their confidence. There would have been, he felt, an exquisite delight in encountering mutual friends and in hugging to his

heart the thought that Helen and he loved each other and that these friends did not know it.

Silly, yes. But silliness was forgivable in a man newly engaged. There would be years when everyone would know that Helen and he were lovers—he had envisaged a passion that would extend half a century—and so he had wanted just a few days when none should share their secret.

But no! Helen's mother had been unable to wait. The engagement had been announced almost in the same sighing breath in which it had been agreed upon. Almost, he now told himself, as though Mrs. Wilson—Helen, too, if he would be honest—had been anxious to commit him irretrievably. He sneeringly supposed that Helen's engagement to Frank Burton would be in the papers the day after to-morrow. Thus Burton would be permitted no chance of withdrawal. Maybe, next week, some man with a hundred millions would supplant Burton. . . .

Hogan interrupted his reverie to announce dinner. What a travesty the meal was on the meal that had been planned. Helen and her mother were to have been there; then the theater; and then, having taken Mrs. Wilson home the young couple would have dropped in at some night club, have danced, have ridden home together and in the kindly shelter of the taxi his arm would have gone around her, her lips would have yielded to his. . . .

Well, that dream was over, but its memories would be always bitter. He smoked a cigarette with his liqueur and was gravely debating the advisability of a highball when Nurse Evans asked to see him.

She was a capable-seeming, plain-looking woman

of middle age. Her manner, while good-humored enough, seemed to say, "No nonsense, please."

"I've a list of things that I'll want from the drug store," she announced. She gave him a paper.

"I'll attend to them right away," he promised. "How is the—patient?"

The nurse shrugged. "As well as can be expected. I don't anticipate anything serious, Mr. Tracy. Rest, care—those two things work wonders, you know."

He nodded assent.

"But Dr. Blanchard was a bit apprehensive," he said.

"As to the future? Yes, I got him on the phone at another patient's house, and—but we can't think about that now, Mr. Tracy. All we can do for her is cure her body. If her mind—I mean if the poor child worries—well, we'll do what we can," she finished. "Will you send for those things?" she asked brusquely.

"I'll go myself," he answered. "Need a breath of air."

An hour later—it had been a rather extensive list that Nurse Evans had prepared—he was back in the house. The nurse met him at the door of the bedroom where Joyce Carroll—the name attracted him—lay, received his bundle of medicines, whispered to him that her patient had finally gone to sleep, and withdrew into the darkened bedroom.

Tracy felt strangely alone. All his life he had lived in this house, and for several years had lived alone, save for his servants. But he'd never felt lonely until to-night. It wasn't, strangely enough, because of his misery over the defection of Helen. It was because

life—even though slumbering or hushed life—existed in the house apart from the staff, and he was shut out of it. The presence of a physician or nurse always remakes the atmosphere of a house, but Tracy was not aware of this, having no previous experience.

He went to his own bedroom, swore that he would not think about Helen, would go right to sleep. But after an hour's restless tossing, he turned on the light, got out a book, and read until dawn. Then he fell into uneasy slumber, visited by dreams in which he was starving.

He awoke to find Hogan fussing with the curtains.

"Let you sleep until nine, sir," said the butler, "then I got nervous. You have a court appointment this morning."

"Much obliged," said Tracy. He leaped out of bed, bathed and shaved and reentered his bedroom to find Hogan ready with his breakfast tray.

"Nora says the young lady seems quite well," said the butler.

"Sleep well?" asked Tracy.

"Fine," the nurse says. "Had a good breakfast—the morning papers—they—well, here they are, sir."

Hogan indicated them, quite unnecessarily, and retired from the room. Tracy picked up a copy of the *Argus*. A front-page headline hit him almost physically. He read the article beneath it.

"Society," he read, "will be rocked by the breaking of the engagement between Miss Helen Wilson, daughter of the late Henry Wilson, clubman and broker, and Laurence Tracy. The dissolving of the engagement was made known by Mrs. Genevieve Wilson, mother of the young society beauty, in a brief note

issued to the press yesterday afternoon. Neither the two Wilson ladies nor Mr. Tracy would comment on the matter.

"But the breaking of the engagement comes as no surprise to those who keep abreast of matters tender in smart circles. For the past three weeks Miss Wilson has been the recipient of assiduous attentions from an elderly man of distinguished financial position——"

Tracy threw the paper on the floor. The snobbery of the article was offensive enough, but much worse than the references to "society" and the use of the word "smart," was the galling intimation that he had been blind where the rest of the world had been granted sight.

Good God, Helen must have flagrantly encouraged . . . But of course she had! Men, even men of the Frank Burton type, do not propose marriage to girls already affianced unless they've been given encouragement. Blind, besotted fool that he had been. But, if he'd been a fool, what had Helen been? To accept and return his caresses, when secretly she was yearning for tenderness from a richer man. . . .

And his friends had been sneering at him. If they hadn't been cynically amused, they'd been cynically pitying. And, with a sudden insight he realized that Helen would not be condemned. People, in these days of feverish living, were too concerned with affairs of their own to waste much time in censuring the actions of others. The prospective bride of fifty millions would be an important and powerful person. . . . What was the matter with him? Did he want Helen's friends to damn her? Did he want people to turn aside from her?

Certainly not. But he did want to hurt her, wanted people to sneer. . . . Unworthy, but damn worthiness. Vulgar, but damn refinement. It was a tactical error to meet vulgarity with good breeding, because the former never understood the latter and therefore was impervious to its attack.

Helen had been vulgar—for what was greed but vulgarity? If, in some equally vulgar way, he could hurt her . . .

"Your office wants you on the telephone, sir."

Hogan was in the doorway, and in his eye Tracy read a comprehending pity. But he didn't want pity. A man conscious of his own strength has no use for pity. He brushed by the butler and descended to the ground floor.

His chief clerk spoke to him.

"Sorry if I've been officious, sir, but—the place is besieged by reporters, and—I managed to secure a postponement of the hearing set for this morning. Thought I'd give you a chance to keep out of the way of the newspapermen until they have another sensation and forget you, sir."

"Much obliged," said Tracy. "I—er—have only seen the *Argus*, and didn't bother to read much of that. Are the other papers——"

"They've made quite a fuss about it," replied the clerk dryly.

"Well, tell the reporters I have nothing to say," said Tracy.

He smiled grimly. He had done nothing wrong, had, so far as his recollections served him, behaved with scrupulous honor. Yet the public, vulgarly inquisitive about the affairs of people with a little more

money than the average, would demand of the press details, details, details.

Well, they'd get none from him. He jammed a hat upon his head. He'd walk around to the garage, get his car. . . . On the outside step he stopped short. Three cameras caught him in a pose of bewildered indignation.

Also, two young women and one young man dashed toward him. Tracy incontinently fled into the house. He slammed the door and stood safely inside, trembling.

He had never known the horrors of unwanted publicity, had, in fact, never been the subject of printed matter. Oh, his name had been included among the lists of those present, and the Mesdames On Dit and the Berties This-and-That who wrote social gossip had occasionally referred to that desirable and eligible young bachelor, Mr. Laurence Tracy.

But nothing like what was promised now. Good Lord, what sort of people thought that a man cared to say anything when he had been jilted? Then he transferred his anger from the reporters and cameraman to their editors. Then he grew enraged at the public, whose final fault it was that privacy was no longer a sacred right in America.

Then, he transferred all his mounting rage to Helen. If she—hadn't been—the thing she was . . .

"Miss Carroll has been asking for you."

At the top of the stairs, looking down upon him with an expression whose compassion made Tracy writhe, stood Nurse Evans.

"Is she able to see anyone?" he asked.

"I—I think you'd better see her—at once," replied the nurse.

Then, as he wonderingly climbed the stairs, she explained.

"The maid, Nora, talked with her while I was out of the room. She had read the morning papers and stupidly told Miss Carroll. I'm afraid she thinks herself responsible——"

"Good Lord," exclaimed Tracy.

He went into the bedroom.

Sleep had done wonders for that face that looked up at him from the mathematically exact middle of the pillow. Tracy recognized the formidable fussiness with which the coverlet was arranged. He had visited friends in hospitals and remembered the businesslike way in which nurses even made beds.

"How are you this morning?" he asked.

"Yesterday," she abruptly began, "you said that you couldn't pull a drowning man half out of water and then drop him, or something similar. But what right has the drowning man to drag you in? You'd be silly to let him drown you. Did—did your fiancée break the engagement because you—were foolishly charitable to a strange woman?"

"I doubt," said Tracy, "that she knows of your existence. How could she? And the engagement was broken before I met you."

"I'm sorry," she said.

He tried to smile. "Sorry that you had no part in the wrecking?"

"That is unnecessary," she said. "I meant—sorry that—if you're unhappy."

Her words in some inexplicable fashion seemed to clarify his thoughts.

"I don't think I am—unhappy," he said.

"But you loved her," she said.

"I loved someone who, I thought, was she," he corrected.

"Isn't that hairsplitting?" she asked. "But—I shouldn't—I have no right to make you discuss the matter."

"I don't particularly mind," he said. And this was strange, because, until a second ago, he could not have borne even the thought of discussion of the broken engagement. "I—I'm not sorry—I'm angry," he added.

"Hurt pride is not a worthy thing," she stated.

"Isn't it?" he asked. "Well, I'm not being bothered with worthiness. I owe her nothing, except to hurt her."

"She's a woman," she reminded him.

"Oh, that's cant," he cried. "Injuries are injuries, and it doesn't matter if it's a woman that inflicts them. Women take too much advantage of their sex. They do mean, cheap things and cry, 'I'm a woman.' As if that condoned the offense. But if a man offers them their own medicine, then he's cowardly, unchivalrous—I'm sorry. My troubles are my own and should not be inflicted upon anyone else. Is there anything I can do for you?"

Her black eyes were misty, though her lips tried to smile at him.

"*You?* Do for me? As if you haven't done—everything. But," and now her voice was almost sav-

agely earnest, "if I could ever do anything for you——"

She was near to tears. This was a very different girl from the one who yesterday had been so brave, so light of wit even in the midst of torture. Or perhaps it wasn't another girl; perhaps—of course—it was merely another side of an admirable character.

"Don't think about it," he said.

"What else will I ever be able to think of—until the debt is paid?" she asked.

"Some debts pay themselves," he said.

Her low broad forehead wrinkled. It was, Tracy told himself, mindful of a child puzzling over a problem too deep for youthful logic.

"I don't know what you mean, though I think it's something nice," she said.

"I mean," he said gravely, "that it is sometimes a privilege to be of help, and that the granting of the privilege more than offsets a debt."

"That," she said judicially, "is sweet. But—I can't look at it that way. I—I'm a burden. I'm in a stranger's house, with each minute adding to my intrusion upon his—charity. Only, I can't get up now." Her eyes were suddenly frightened.

Tracy involuntarily touched her hand, patted it reassuringly.

"I tell you, you're to think of nothing but of getting well and strong," he told her.

"And I'll never think of anything but of repaying you," she said. "But I never can. How can money —supposing that I ever have money enough—how can money repay a debt that's more than material? What have I to give?"

"Yourself," said Tracy.

He was startled at the idea that swept through his brain. It was an unworthy idea, a shaming idea, but —what had he to do with worthiness or with shame?

"Oh," exclaimed the girl. Color swept over her face, and in her eyes was disappointment, as though a child had seen a precious toy destroyed.

"I don't mean," said Tracy stiffly, "what you imply. I thought I'd made that clear. But I mean—you say you want to repay me. You intimated that you'd do anything—will you marry me?"

She tried to raise herself on the pillow.

"Marry you?"

She stared at him incredulously.

"Marry me," he said.

"But—are you joking?" she asked.

"It would be a queer joke, wouldn't it?" he retorted.

"But—you don't mean it. You don't love me."

"But I hate someone else," he said.

Now she understood. Her face was pale now, and she struggled to keep aversion from her eyes.

"But that—to hurt her—you wouldn't do that," she said.

"Wouldn't I? Try me. But you—your desire to repay—not that you need to pay, but—your words meant little, eh?"

"I did mean them, but—I don't know you."

"People can be engaged and still not know each other," he remarked. "They can even be married and be hardly acquainted. In fact," he added, and at his implication pallor left her face to be replaced by crimson, "I'd hardly expect to become acquainted with

you." He suddenly became dry and businesslike of tone.

"You have no money; you have a hatred of charity. You rebel at being under an obligation. The laws of New York, Miss Carroll, *compel* a husband to support a wife. There are advantages in the proposition."

"For me," she said.

"For me, also," he added. "You get protection, and support, but I—get even."

"A cheap thing," she said.

"But beyond price to me," he said.

She looked at him fully a minute. Then, relaxing, sighing, she spoke.

"I'll marry you."

## CHAPTER VII

T RACY looked at his wife. Then he glanced at the marriage license bureau official who had just made him a husband and made this stranger woman a wife. There was a look of expectancy in the eyes of the official, and the clerks who had been called in as witnesses were smirking meaningfully.

He felt compelled to what conformity expected of him. He bent his head—not much, for her lips were very little below the level of his own, and his mouth touched hers. She neither greeted nor evaded his caress. The lips that met his were cold, unresponsive, but she did not turn aside her head.

The license official, conscious of a snug fee, escorted them to the door of his office, murmured banalities which neither of them heard, and a moment later they were in a taxi, speeding uptown.

It seemed to him that she had placed herself at the far end of the seat, that she was occupying the least possible space, as though proximity to him was distasteful.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"For what?" she asked.

He could not see her averted face.

"For kissing you," he explained.

Her shoulders moved slightly. The shrug might have indicated embarrassment, distaste, contempt or resignation.

"There are privileges which, having been paid for, must be granted," she replied.

"There are none which need be granted to me," he told her. "I thought you understood."

Now she turned her head, and he felt an inward shrinking from the blazing contempt in her eyes. She had been apathetic on the ride to the city hall, and apathetic during the brief marriage ceremony. But now all that was gone.

She had shown him brief glimpses of many sides to her character during the week that he had known her. There had been the stark courage of their first meeting, the fiery pride of her, and blistering self-contempt at her own physical weakness. There had been the unexpected wit when, after Dr. Blanchard's first ministrations, she had received him in his own bedroom, clothed in his pajamas. There had been the swift sympathy for his unhappiness, and then there had been her aversion when he had suggested marriage.

During the week that had intervened between his proposal and this mockery of a ceremony which they had just gone through, it had seemed to him that every time they met she deliberately erected between them a wall, an impalpable yet impassable wall. It was as though she wished to afford him no further revelations of herself, as though a lamp were extinguished upon his approach.

Not, he told himself, that he expected her to show a gayety that must be feigned. But she needn't show so plainly the contempt she felt. After all, she didn't have to marry him. On the day after she had said that she would do so, he had clumsily approached the matter of her destitute condition. He had intimated

that he would consider it a privilege to advance her any sum she might require, for any purpose she might wish.

It had been a cruelly unfair thing to take advantage of her condition and thus gain her acceptance to a marriage that was, on the very face of things, utterly preposterous.

But she had coolly told him that unless he repented of his bargain she was prepared to go through with her part of it. And he, smarting under the continued publicity given the breaking of the engagement with Helen, dogged by reporters and hounded by cameramen, conscious of the hidden smiles of his acquaintances, obsessed with the idea of hurting Helen, had told her that he was eager to go through with it.

Dr. Blanchard had talked with him almost hotly.

"Damn it all, Larry," he said, "there are certain decencies."

"Marriage," Tracy had mockingly answered, "is the essence of decency."

"But it's so unfair," Blanchard had cried.

"I'd like to know what's unfair about it," Tracy had retorted. "God knows I don't want to talk about it—but do you think I like the whole world to know that I've been jilted? If she'd waited——"

"What good would that have done?" inquired the doctor.

"I don't know and don't care. But Helen deserves nothing from me. If I can show her friends—and the whole crowd are never concerned with anything but appearances—if I can show them that being jilted had no really crushing effect upon me—if I can make

Helen ridiculous—what do I care whether I'm fair to her or not?"

"You talk," Blanchard had told him, "like a spoiled brat. You place a cheap vanity above anything else. My God, don't you suppose men have been jilted before? And what do you care about what people think? Don't you know that in a month hardly anyone will even remember that you were *acquainted* with Helen Wilson?"

"I'll remember it," said Tracy grimly, "and she'll remember it."

"And you'll sacrifice a lifetime that might have been filled with happiness to a revengeful whim, a whim that won't even have the effect you hope for? Do you think Helen Wilson, engaged to Burton, will care what you do? She'll merely laugh, will hug to herself the thought that you married another girl out of pique."

"Will she? I wonder," said Tracy. "And as for happiness—I never expect it. I don't even want it."

"And I don't care whether you get it or not," exclaimed his friend. "You've not merely the temper of a spoiled child, but its logic. Who's asking you to be fair to Helen? And why on earth did you think I meant *you*, when I spoke of a life that might be filled with happiness?"

Tracy, attempting mockery, looked searchingly about the library where they sat.

"I don't see anyone else here whom you could mean," he said.

Blanchard jerked a thumb upward.

"The sun rises and sets on yourself, doesn't it? I'm thinking of the damned unfairness to that poor kid up-

stairs. I'm thinking of *her* unhappiness, not yours, my lad."

Tracy elevated quizzical eyebrows.

"She's apparently of age. You say that she's recovering with amazing speed. You maintain that her mind is O.K., that she's throwing off the effects of shock. She's old enough to know what she wants, isn't she?"

"She can know what she wants and not be able to get it," retorted Blanchard.

"I'm not *forcing* her to marry me. How could I? I've offered her money——"

"Which she has too much pride to accept," interrupted Blanchard.

"Before she fainted, before I brought her here, she took money," said Tracy.

"She was starving then. Now—rested——"

"Don't talk rot," jeered Tracy. "She won't take money from me, but she'll marry me. Well, the ethics of the two points of view are beyond me."

"Because," said Blanchard savagely, "you've never starved, never been up against it. Who can blame her, a waif, a stray, for jumping at a chance such as you offer her? But because a young girl is willing to make a mistake doesn't mean that it's right for you to let her make it."

"You seem," said Tracy, "singularly concerned over her."

"Because she's a corker," cried Blanchard. "A straight, brave, decent— Oh, hell!" He studied Tracy's countenance. "If—if you were in love with her—" He paused expectantly.

"That," said Tracy, "is rather absurd, isn't it?"

Blanchard pursed his lips. "She's a beauty," he declared. "You know, I warned you that she might be a remedy for what ills Helen had inflicted upon you."

"That was when you visualized her as my mistress, wasn't it?" asked Tracy. "Now it's too bad to make her my wife. *Then* it was all right to make her my mistress."

"Because," said Blanchard, "I was then as much of a cad as you are now."

"The only place we'll get, if this continues, is to the end of a friendship," suggested Tracy.

Blanchard had promptly risen to his feet.

"Sorry, old man. Whatever you do—I may advance objections before it's done, but after the accomplished fact—it's all right with me. Sorry."

"'S all right," muttered Tracy.

And that had been that.

With no other friend had he discussed the planned marriage. Indeed, he had hardly left the house during the past week. He had left it to his chief clerk to postpone all legal engagements, and had refused even to answer the telephone.

What could anyone wish to talk to him about? He didn't want any friend to mention Helen, and if the friend didn't mention his ex-fiancée he would know that it was through unwillingness to touch a sore spot. . . .

Of course, the servants knew that the invalid in his bedroom was soon to become the mistress of the house. Tracy told Hogan, told him in a colorless voice that forbade any comment even from this devoted servitor. But Hogan had not offered the mock-

ery of congratulation. As for Nurse Evans, her manner took on a strange coldness, but what did Tracy care?

And now, on this first day when Dr. Blanchard had given his consent for the patient to leave the house, they had driven down town together and been married. "Until death do us part. . . . Whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder. . . . For better and for worse. . . ."

The ceremony itself, pronounced over them by a layman to whom the event was a commonplace, raised from inconsiderableness only by the fact that grooms were sometimes extraordinarily generous, and witnessed by clerks whose only interest was a furtive salaciousness, had made no impression upon Tracy.

But now, as it receded behind him, its implications took hold, and all the conventionality that was his background rebelled against the outrageous thing he had done, the wicked thing that he had persuaded this young girl to do. Or perhaps, instead of these implications, this thrusting into the foreground of a hazy background, it was the expression on the girl's face that made him realize what he—she, too—had done.

"How can one be sure of understanding anything about a man like you?" she demanded.

His own contempt for himself was about all that he could bear. That she, who was equally guilty of the travesty on which should be the most sacred occurrence of life, should add to his burden by the visitation of her own contempt upon him, was not to be borne.

He met her anger with an equal rage.

"You value yourself too highly," he said. "I told

you that the first time we met. I tell you so again now. You have nothing—that I want," he added deliberately.

"And I," she told him, "would never wish to give anything."

"You may even rest assured," he went on, "that after your usefulness to me had ceased, I shall in no way interfere with any plans you may care to make for the future."

"My usefulness," she sneered—the grimace that usually brings ugliness to the loveliest face somehow but rendered her more attractive—"will cease, I suppose, as soon as Miss Wilson is aware that you were able to forget your grief in marriage?"

"Not quite," he said. "I do not wish her to think that I merely—was married. I wish our marriage, apparently, to be a happy one."

"You think we can successfully impose such a pretense on anyone?" she asked.

"Unless you try," he said, "I shall feel that what you said—about being willing to repay me, was a cheap promise, lightly made, with no honest intent behind it."

He felt, angrily, that he sounded bookish, unreal. But the situation in which they found themselves was so outside his experience, that he knew no way to meet it.

"I shall keep my word," she said.

Then she turned her head away from him, and they arrived in silence at the house. Behind Hogan could be seen the smiling face of Nora, and Kinjo, the Jap cook, a chef's cap looking strangely out of place above his swarthy countenance.

But the welcome that had been planned for the bride and groom died a-borning. Even loyal old Hogan could not maintain the pretense of celebration. Not in the face of the set, stern countenances of these two young people. So the planned boisterousness became a curtsy on the part of Nora, a sickly grin on the part of Kinjo, and an abashed lowering of the eyelids on the part of Hogan.

Then, in the library, the young couple were alone. Tracy was first to break the silence.

"It is usual," he said, "for a newly married couple to go on a wedding trip."

"Whatever you like," she replied, indifferently.

"It's what *you* like," he said.

"I?" she shrugged. "*If my usefulness*"—she stressed the word—"can be increased by a wedding journey, then I suppose it is my duty to become enthusiastic at the prospect."

He sat down deliberately, first placing a chair for her.

"Suppose," he said, "that we come to a reasonable understanding. Anger, recrimination, quarreling, will get us nowhere. We both very deliberately did a thing. We are both—well, not proud of it. But—we've done it. We must continue, so far as the rest of the world is concerned, to pretend we are happy. That will be difficult if—we quarrel when we are alone. I shall not inflict myself upon you forever. There is such a thing as divorce, and, after a reasonable length of time, I shall not interfere with your procuring a divorce. In the meantime, suppose we consult each other's inclinations, show that courtesy

to each other which will make it possible for us not to be—too miserable."

Her face that had been stern, softened slightly.

"Let's," she said, with a return of the impulsiveness that had seemed part of her. "At least, if we despise ourselves, let's not try to despise each other."

"Fair enough," said Tracy.

They found themselves shaking hands on the bargain, and Tracy was aware of the fact that her hand was both soft and firm at the same time. Then their fingers fell apart.

"I should like, if you don't mind, not to go anywhere," she said. "I—I'm still tired."

"Of course," said Tracy.

He watched her go from the room, and he was conscious of admiration for the dignity with which she moved. In the doorway she stopped and looked back.

"May I—dine in my room?" she asked.

He nodded assent. Then she was gone. He sank into a chair, to remain, absolutely still, until Hogan announced dinner. Then, white, strained, worrying about what Hogan was thinking even while he assured himself that it didn't matter what Hogan thought, he dined. That ordeal successfully undergone, he instructed Hogan to tell any newspapermen who, having learned of his marriage, would wish to revive the sensation of last week, that he and Mrs. Tracy—how odd the title sounded—were out of town. Then he went to that room which he had occupied since Joyce's arrival in his house.

How cheap a thing revenge was! And how futile, especially when one's revenge reacted—as all revenge must—upon one's self. What an ass! What a

wicked fool! He, Laurence Tracy, to have married a woman about whom he knew nothing beyond the fact that her name had been Joyce Carroll.

But there were, in this city, others who knew more of his wife than the man who had married her. And one of these, aptly though not euphoniously known as Ratty Rogan, looked up from the evening paper, with its glaring headlines:

#### LAURENCE TRACY MARRIES JOYCE CARROLL

Jilted Fiancé of Helen Wilson  
Finds Solace with  
Another Girl

He smiled beatifically.

"So," said Rogan, "that's where she went. That's what happened. How in hell did she cop herself a swell like that? And what do I get for keeping me mouth shut about—everything?"

For the Tracy-Carroll wedding was to stir more than the upper world. The underworld would ripple also.

## CHAPTER VIII

THE Bachelors Club buzzed. Over at the Mallet, tongues wagged as gayly and incessantly as ever a group of spinsters at a sewing circle condemned a wayward sister. For men are even greater gossips than women, and the fiction that they are not is but one of thousands whereby the masculine sex seeks to bolster up the false premise of its superiority.

Not that the women ignored the subject. After all, when something exciting happens in the business world, all interested in business discuss the matter. A big failure in Wall Street, at first thought, may not seem important to a country grocer, and one may wonder at his intense interest. But everything that disturbs business, or credit, may react unfavorably toward his collection of overdue accounts, so his interest has the solid foundation of selfishness.

Marriage is still the supreme business of woman. The arts, the professions, and the commercial ventures may attract increasing thousands, but the millions still look forward to husbands as the climax of achievement. So that Larry Tracy's sudden marriage to an utterly unknown girl was the choicest bit of morning menu offered by the daily press.

Here was what is generally known as an eligible bachelor. In other words, he came from what is commonly considered a good family: i.e. his more im-

mediate ancestors had succeeded in amassing a comfortable fortune without going to jail. In addition to wealth, he belonged to the correct clubs, knew the so-called right people.

The young woman in Harlem, whose highest aspiration was a shipping clerk, nevertheless took the same interest in Larry Tracy, to whom she could never look forward, that Park Avenue took. Harlem and the Avenue—men, husbands, were the ultimate goal, and a slackening of the market at the top was a matter of importance to those less highly placed.

Newspaper editors know what their readers want, and they knew that the marriage of Larry Tracy, following so closely upon his receiving his *congé* from Helen Wilson, was the biggest news feature of the day. The afternoon editions bulletined the news, but the press on the next morning spread it in immense headlines for the world to read.

The family history of Larry Tracy; his disinterest in what was generally known as society; his youth; his travels abroad; his engagement to Helen Wilson; her jilting of him; the rumors that she was to marry a much older man of many millions; the mystery as to the identity of the bride; all these things combined to make a good story.

It was all very well for Larry to tell his butler to get rid of inquisitive newspaper folk, but it was a different thing for Hogan to carry out his master's orders. When Larry looked up at the breakfast tray which Hogan brought in the next morning, the old man asked him to look out the window.

There, gathered in laughing groups across the street, were groups of easily identifiable newspaper

folk. Cameramen were there, also, and Tracy felt a sinking of the heart as he realized, for the first time in his life, what pitiless publicity could mean. It did not occur to him that he had invited this publicity, that he had wished to humiliate Helen, and that when we attempt injury to others we cannot always escape injury ourselves. The bomb thrower is frequently blown to bits himself, and the reaction of injury against the one who inflicts it is one of the laws of nature.

He looked up at Hogan. That faithful servitor silently handed him the morning papers. Revived were the snapshots of a week ago. There were pictures of Helen, of her mother, of Frank Burton. He would not read the stories, but a glance at them told him that speculation was rife as to the identity of his wife. There was even, in one paper, a headline asking who was Joyce Carroll?

He smiled grimly. Beyond answering that she was now Mrs. Laurence Tracy, he could not answer that question himself.

"It looks as though they're going to hang around a long time," he said to Hogan.

The old man nodded. "If I might suggest, Mr. Laurence——"

"Go ahead," said Tracy.

"If you left town for a while—maybe went abroad —give the newspapers time to find another sensation——"

"My marriage is a sensation, then," commented Tracy.

Hogan permitted himself the liberty of a shrug.

"There's fifty telegrams, sir," the butler said.

"Keep them—I'll read them some other time," said Tracy.

Hogan nodded. Tracy climbed out of bed, sniffed the aroma of the bacon and coffee, and grinned at his butler.

"Well, no crime has been committed, Hogan," he laughed, "so I guess I can enjoy breakfast."

"The young lady enjoyed hers, Nora tells me," said Hogan softly.

Tracy's face hardened slightly. "Tell Mrs. Tracy that I'll be in to see her shortly," he said.

As Hogan left the room he could have struck himself. Why had he felt it necessary to say that to Hogan? And why had the swiftly uttered words rung so falsely? Good Lord, had he let himself in for months, possibly years, of embarrassment? Was dear old Hogan, who would gladly die for his master, looking at that master with pitying contempt?

Somehow he read in the butler's manner an appreciation of Joyce and a condemnation of himself? This was super-sensitiveness; this was silly. Even if true, what did it matter? Was he so thin-skinned that it mattered to him what servants and strangers thought?

He bathed, ran a razor over his face, and reentered the bedroom to find the bacon cold and the coffee slightly chilled. Nevertheless, because he was young and healthy, he ate greedily and at the conclusion of the meal felt better mentally as well as physically.

He lighted a cigarette and pondered the situation. No one could tell how long he would be of prime interest to the public and therefore to the press. But if he disappeared, left the country, the newspapers, unable to gather news about him, would drop him. Last night

Joyce had said she didn't wish to go anywhere, but—  
women change their minds.

He dressed, and knocked upon the door of that bedroom which had once been his, but which had been hers since her strange entrance into his home.

Nora opened the door. Her rosy-cheeked face was aglow with greeting. Women, Tracy mused, were not concerned with minor ethics. Results suited them. It might not be a nice thing for him to marry a strange girl as the result of a vengeful whim, and men might be condemnatory. But the average woman would only see the romance in the matter, and romance satisfied them.

"May I come in?" he asked.

From beyond the half-opened door a gay voice greeted him.

"Do," it called.

Nora, trying to keep meaning from her smile, made way for him. Although Tracy's back was to the maid, he felt her glance upon him, and was relieved when the door closed behind her.

He looked at his wife. He didn't know what he had expected, but he had certainly not anticipated gayety. She was lying in bed. Just when she had acquired the bright-colored negligee which covered her shoulders he did not know. He remembered, with resentment at himself, that during the days that had elapsed between proposal and marriage he had said nothing about money, had not ordered the stores to send selections of garments. . . . Now he remembered that yesterday she had worn a dress and hat which were different from the poor garments she had worn when they had first met. And during the week

of her residence here she had appeared in garments which had not been taken from her wardrobe.

That five hundred dollars which he had given her . . .

She answered the question of his eyes. She touched the soft folds of the negligee.

"Yours," she said. Was there a touch of mockery in her voice?

"Mine?" He stared at her.

"The money you gave a starving girl for food has gone for clothing," she told him. "And you never thought about it?"

He shook his head. "A woman's ideal," she laughed. "A husband who doesn't question what his wife does with his money."

"That question will never be raised between us," he said.

"How do you know but that my extravagance will ruin you?" she asked.

There was color in her cheeks now, sparkle in her lustrous eyes, even her hair seemed to have caught a sheen. Perhaps those mysterious women whom he had encountered in the house recently, those hair-dressers and manicures, might account for part of all this, but he didn't think their ministrations made for all the changes in her appearance.

Certainly, beautifying processes could not have brought her gayety, and gay she assuredly was.

"I'll chance it," he answered her.

"A man who takes the chances you've taken wouldn't mind one more," she said.

"I've taken no chance without considering it in advance," he replied.

She smiled at him, and he thought he caught a hint of tenderness in that smile. But he dismissed the thought.

"You were very cautious, were filled with practicality, when you brought a strange woman to your house, weren't you?" she laughed. "And you have shown yourself to be the kind that weighs every move by your marriage yesterday."

"I do not regret it," he said stiffly.

She pointed at a pile of newspapers on the foot of the bed.

"Not even after reading those?" she asked.

"I haven't read them," he told her.

"Not read them?" Her eyes were incredulous. "Don't you look in the mirror ever to see if your tie is properly knotted? And here is a mirror—you know those things at Coney Island? Mirrors that make you thin, or short, or tall, or fat, that distort you? But those caricatures, unflattering though they may be, nevertheless show you as you *might* look to others. And these newspapers, with their innuendo, their gossip, their speculation, their wonderment—they present the picture of you—and of me—that will be our real identities to the public until—well, until the public decided we are different. I don't see how—haven't you natural curiosity?"

"I never want to hear bad report of myself," he answered.

Why couldn't he speak naturally to her? Why must he phrase his thought in clumsy words that sounded schoolboyish?

"But I do," she cried. "Bad or good—whatever people say, or print—it's interesting. The most ma-

licious lies about ourselves may contain an element of truth. And don't forget—we are never what we think we are—we're only what other people imagine we are."

He tried to laugh. "Philosophical reflection doesn't interest me this morning," he said.

"Then I shall try to be less dull," she told him.

"But you aren't dull," he protested. "I—was afraid that this morning—you'd be upset——"

"I, too," she interrupted dryly, "weigh an action in advance."

"Still," he said, "the publicity——"

"A few days ago," she said, "I was starving. I was as destitute as it is possible for a person to be—and still survive. You're looking at it from my angle. I think that yesterday—and before yesterday—I was looking at it from the wrong angle. We might as well be frank, mightn't we?"

"Please," he said.

"It—it seemed to me a rather contemptible thing that, in order to get even for a slight—oh, being jilted may be more than a slight, but you know what I mean! Well, it seemed to me that you were—rather petty. And I—who accepted charity that had been most generously offered, dared to think critically of you. And you, knowing how I felt—please—I owe you gratitude. I owe you everything. I could have refused to marry you, could have left your house. I didn't leave. I married you. I owe you——"

"Nothing," he said. "But—that you don't despise me——"

"You didn't despise me for being a failure, did you?"

He caught her implication.

"Then I'm a failure?"

"You haven't made a successful marriage," she said.  
"You—did something that you'll regret, but—I shall  
try——"

Her lips trembled, and he swiftly intervened against  
the threatened onrush of tears.

"I'm sure of that," he said.

Then his jaw dropped and his eyes widened. For  
the trembling lips parted and from her throat came  
gay laughter. For a moment he thought she was  
hysterical, but hysteria holds no note of amusement,  
and she was genuinely mirthful.

"I don't understand—what you are laughing at?"  
he demanded.

She met his eyes.

"I think it's funny," she said.

"What's funny?"

"Our marriage—oh, everything. Isn't it? It's  
either a comedy or a tragedy, and I refuse to believe  
it's that. So, it must be funny. Two people, who  
don't know each other, who haven't fallen in love at  
first sight, deliberately get married—one to satisfy  
pique and the other for an even less exalted reason—  
well, isn't it funny?"

"It may be," he said slowly. "Perhaps it's better  
that we look at it that way."

"I'm sure it is," she said. "I wish," she suddenly  
added, "that I could see Miss Wilson now."

He stared at her. "Why?"

"Oh, you wouldn't understand," she evaded.

He frowned. This was the first touch of vulgarity  
she had shown. But—it was better that he didn't

choose an interpretation that was not the sole possible construction of her words.

"I want to go abroad," he said abruptly.

"Very well," she agreed.

"But last night, you didn't want——"

"Last night was last night and now we've arrived at this morning," she said.

"You have clothing enough?"

She smiled archly. "A woman can go to Paris with nothing. When she gets there——"

He shrugged at this. Her words again were capable of misconstruction. She might mean that she had had this thought in mind all along, that her marriage had been motivated solely by his money.

But this was ridiculous. Of course it had been so motivated. Gratitude wouldn't have made her marry him. It was his money. Well, what of it? She was honest about it. And perhaps she was merely being light-spirited. Why, no matter why she was gay, he ought to be grateful that she was gay! Her mirth, even if it were forced, was better than tears, better than an expressed regret for what they had done.

"The *Gigantic* sails to-night," he told her.

She giggled. "That sounds like a line from a melodrama. The *Gigantic* sails and the papers must be aboard."

"Shall we go?" He ignored her mockery. "Shall we get away from this?"

He glanced at the pile of newspapers upon the foot of her bed.

"Why not?" she acquiesced.

## CHAPTER IX

H E PICKED up the telephone near the head of her bed. He called his office and got his managing clerk.

"I want every case postponed for a couple of months," he abruptly stated.

Into the clerk's voice came dismay.

"But Mr. Tracy——"

"You'll have to do it," he said.

He could almost see the clerk shrug. "Very well, sir. I'll do my best."

"I want a suite on the *Gigantic* to-night," went on Tracy. "Two bedrooms—" he colored faintly and tried to make his voice matter-of-fact—"and a sitting room. And my passport—I want my wife's name added——"

"I'll have to have a photograph, sir," said the clerk.

"Get a photographer up here immediately. Can it be arranged so quickly?"

The clerk laughed. "Ten dollars here and five dollars there——"

"Make it twenty here and ten there," suggested Tracy.

He hung up and faced his wife. There was a bewildered pleasure in her eyes.

"Money can do anything, almost, can't it?" she asked.

"It can always help out a situation," he smiled.

"But I thought that passports——"

"That's the reason for the tens and twenties you heard me mention," he laughed. "Consular clerks are not overpaid."

She sat suddenly up in bed, and the flimsy negligee fell away from her shoulders and throat. The revelation hinted at delicious contours and despite himself Tracy felt his blood stir.

"Do you know," she said, in a voice that was almost awed, "that I have never been abroad? I've never been on an ocean liner. I—I've never seen—anything."

There are men who feel a genuine pleasure in giving. Their motives, subjected to the harsh scrutiny of analysis, prove to be selfish, but it is a kind of selfishness which the world needs. Tracy felt that pleasure now. For this girl, whom he had not even known a few days ago, he would unfold the magic of the Old World. He, who liked travel, would find his enjoyment enhanced by her delight. Why, the trip, instead of being a flight from the newspapers, would be a lazily joyous journey. . . .

After all, he caught himself, while they could dissemble momentarily, they could not keep it up. His voice did not reflect the enthusiasm he had felt a second ago as he made answer to her.

"I'll try to show you everything worth while."

Artificiality crept into his speech. Why couldn't he be as natural as she? Why didn't he have her adaptability to the situation?

"Are you sure you have enough clothes?" he asked.  
"After all, five hundred dollars——"

"Is what you might lose at bridge in an evening,"

she cut in. "Five hundred dollars? Miss Evans and Nora shopped for me. And I have over two hundred dollars left."

"Then," and he regained his lightness, "you won't bankrupt me?"

"That," she smiled, "I can't promise."

The telephone rang and he answered it. It was his chief clerk, to announce that a photographer was on his way to the house now, that he had got in touch with the passport officials and that as soon as Mrs. Tracy's photograph was delivered all formalities would be speeded through, and to inform his employer that a suite had been engaged on the *Gigantic*. Also, the clerk had taken upon himself to arrange for a letter of credit and a supply of cash. Tracy expressed his appreciation, and hung up.

"Now," sighed the girl, "I really believe we're going."

She said "we," not "I," and Tracy felt an inexplicable gratification at her choice of pronouns.

"I think you'd better dress—the photographer will be here any minute," he told her. "You're sure you feel strong enough to travel?"

She smiled at him, and he departed on that smile, savoring it more than he knew.

Hogan met him in the hall outside her room.

"We're sailing for Europe," Tracy told him. "Pack everything I need and send the things to the *Gigantic*."

"The house," began Hogan.

"As it is," said Tracy.

"Very well, sir," Hogan hesitated. "If I were you, sir, I'd let the reporters in, Mr. Tracy. Otherwise, they'll hang around, dog you every minute——"

Tracy hesitated. "Maybe you're right, Hogan. I'll see them."

He went downstairs, entered the living room and tried to gather composure against the visitation of a horde of ogres.

The ogres were not ushered into his presence by his butler, instead, a quite attractive group of young men and women gathered around him a few minutes later. One of them—who introduced himself as Stanway of the *Chronicle*—seemed to have been delegated as spokesman.

"Mr. Tracy, we don't want to annoy you. But you mustn't forget that you're news."

"I won't debate the point," said Tracy, amiably.

"And it's our job to get the news," went on young Stanway. "And the easier you make it for us, why—the easier we'll make it for you."

"That," said Tracy quietly, "is decent of you."

Stanway eyed him. He couldn't be sure whether this quiet-voiced man was being sardonic or not.

"We, as individuals, have no wish to pry into your personal affairs, Mr. Tracy. But as newspapermen——"

"What do you want to know?" interrupted Tracy.

"How long have you known Mrs. Tracy?" asked the reporter.

"Suppose," said a voice from the doorway, "that I answer the question?"

Tracy leaped to his feet. He had the same sensation that he had felt when, as a child, he had read of Christians being tossed to the lions in the Roman Arena. He, for reason politic, had met these reporters, hoping that wit would carry him through. But

for his wife—long afterwards he realized that he had considered her his wife definitely, with finality, for the first time upon this entrance into his library—to meet the battery of questions, was unthinkable.

But his protective movement came too late. Not only had the reporters turned to her and surrounded her, but she was moving, with an easy grace, into the middle of the room.

"Please do," begged Stanway.

"For months, ever since I came to New York," she said.

Tracy gasped. Her voice was as assured, as confident, as though it were exact truth she uttered, instead of a brazen falsehood. Lies were distasteful to him, but he could not withhold admiration for the easy artistry with which she uttered hers.

And he noted, with pride, that the masculine reporters eyed her with patent admiration, and there was approval in the glances of the women.

"You were aware of his engagement to Miss Wilson?" asked Stanway.

"Of course," she replied.

"Then you didn't expect to marry him?" persisted the reporter.

She smiled upon the newspaperman. It was a smile calculated to win the young man's heart.

"Of course I didn't," she said.

"But when the engagement was broken——"

"Why, that made it different, didn't it?" she said.

"Would you tell us where you come from? You're not a New Yorker, are you?" inquired Stanway.

She shook her head. "I'm from Maine—Belfast, Maine. And that, don't you think, about covers it

all? Mr. Tracy and I are married—that's all."

Tracy did not know how it was done. But it was accomplished. It was not her speech, it was her manner—it was nothing that he could define. But she got rid of them. Got rid of them amiably, cheerfully, and with congratulatory words upon their lips.

After they'd gone he stared at her.

"I was afraid, when Hogan told me that you'd let them in, you'd say too much," she said. "Or that you might get angry——"

Later he was to understand that she had charm, and also a great gift of enlisting quick sympathy. But now he could not comprehend how men and women, avid for many words, had been content with so few.

"You might," he laughed, "sometime help me with a jury."

She looked at him. "Even that is conceivable," she answered quietly. "I hope—you didn't mind."

"Mind? I'm so grateful——"

"To earn your gratitude, even in a small matter, helps," she said.

She wore a simple little frock of plainest blue serge, relieved at the throat with a touch of white. Her feet were shod with ridiculously fragile slippers, and her legs were clad in smooth silk. He began, in advance of complete comprehension, to understand why the reporters had been so easily handled.

"You're a very beautiful thing," he said impulsively.

"There is no higher flattery than praise from a husband," she smiled.

"Bridegrooms are usually amenable to a bride's beauty," he rejoined.

She shrugged slightly. "Only—that rule doesn't—apply here," she reminded him.

He reddened at the implication. "You needn't remind me," he said.

"I wasn't," she said, "reminding you of anything. I—but let's not misunderstand each other. We've managed to reach a—a note of—well, an arrangement on which we can get along, and—I'll never misunderstand you, if you'll never misunderstand me."

"At least," he said, "I'll pretend that I don't. Will that do?"

"Superbly," she laughed.

Either she was the greatest actress in the world, the greatest that had ever lived, or—and Tracy's pulses leaped—she didn't mind being married to him. Quite unconscious of what he was doing, he took a step toward her. Whether or not he might have translated that forward movement into an embrace, he never knew. For Hogan entered the room.

"The photographer is here, sir," he said. "And I wish you'd look at certain suits, Mr. Tracy."

Tracy turned to his wife. "You won't need me?"

"Of course not."

He colored again. He had heard that newly-wed husbands adopted a protective attitude toward their wives, believed them incapable of crossing a street without grave danger, but the attitude of a bridegroom—as she had just reminded him—hardly was applicable to him.

He left her in the library, accosted the photographer, saw that he was accompanied by a lesser clerk from his law office, who could attend to all formalities of having his wife's name and picture added to the

passport, accepted the clerk's felicitations on the marriage, and went upstairs with Hogan.

Hogan kept him longer than he had anticipated, and when he reached the ground floor again, the clerk and photographer had departed, and his wife was not in the library.

He started upstairs again. He had nothing to say to her; why should he intrude upon her? If she'd wanted to see him, if she'd wanted to say anything to him, she'd have waited downstairs for him, wouldn't she? Or she would have entered the room where Hogan and he debated garments in search of him, wouldn't she?

He sat down in a chair. She was utterly charming, utterly beautiful, and was more completely mistress of herself than any woman he had ever known. She had encountered a bizarre situation with bravery; she had handled a more bizarre climax with superb tact. She was, when you came right down to it, an extraordinary woman.

Now Tracy was given, occasionally, to introspection, to self-analysis. He surrendered to such a mood now.

To-morrow morning—perhaps this afternoon—the newspaper reading public would know as much about his wife as he knew. It would know that she came from Maine, and that was all that he knew. She might even not have told the truth about that detail. Certainly she had not told the truth about their acquaintance. She had lied deliberately when she had told the reporters that they had been acquainted for several months.

Of course, it was a justifiable lie. Nevertheless, the

ease with which she had uttered it had shown her capable of misrepresentation on a small scale. Why couldn't she be capable of it on a large scale? Here was a woman who, by the strangest set of circumstances imaginable, had been lifted from direst poverty to affluence. A week ago she had been near death from starvation; to-day she was the wife of a comparatively wealthy man.

Dr. Jimmy Blanchard had warned him that hearts were often caught on the rebound. Tracy had never considered himself impressionable. He had liked girls, had fancied himself madly in love on more than one occasion before Helen Wilson had captured his heart. But all that had been natural. But it was not natural that he should feel something warmer than admiration for a girl about whom he knew nothing and who had married him solely to escape from poverty.

She had charm; she had will; she had everything needful toward the subjugation of a man. In addition, there would be propinquity, that intimacy inseparable from any marriage, even such a marriage as theirs.

Would she, having tasted luxury, be content to give it up? Would she willingly assent to a divorce when the time seemed ripe for that step? Would she not prefer to be Mrs. Laurence Tracy, mistress of his home, and in attaining that preference would she not deliberately make herself mistress of his heart?

He had found out that one woman had been able to win his heart without giving the tiniest bit of herself in return. Helen had taught him that a man in love can be blind to the fact that his love is not re-

turned. Suppose this woman, this wife of his, chose to—well, vamp him? Coolly, deliberately, she might set out to win him, and then—Helen had shattered his heart, but this woman might be able to destroy his pride.

Then he laughed at himself. He knew himself pretty well. He would never love a woman again. And what a funny thing that a husband should warn himself against the danger of falling in love with his wife. Joyce—he liked the name—had been right. This was not a tragedy, it was a comedy, and he would maintain it upon the latter level.

The bell at the front door rang. Hogan was upstairs and Nora was doubtless busy with Joyce. As for Kinjo, it was beneath his dignity to answer bells. He walked into the hall and opened the door.

On the stoop stood a shabby, furtive-eyed individual.

"I wanna see Mrs. Tracy," said the man.

"I'm Mr. Tracy," said Larry.

Ratty Rogan looked up at him.

"Is that so?" he said. "Is th-a-a-t so? Well, listen Mr. Tracy, I know your wife."

"Yes?" said Tracy.

"Better let me come in and have a little talk with you," suggested Ratty. "My name is Rogan."

Instinctively Tracy felt menace, not open menace, not honorable threat, but furtive, sneaking, unclean premonition of evil.

"And what do you want with Mrs. Tracy?" he asked.

"She's an old friend of mine," said Rogan.

"That," said Tracy, "I am unwilling to believe."

"And her being a friend of mine, Mr. Tracy, and me not wanting to do her no harm—well, I thought maybe, if I told you a few things about her——"

Rogan was not aware of his own inconsistency. He was, in face, aware of nothing. The blow that Tracy hit him robbed him of any awareness on any subject whatsoever.

## CHAPTER X

R EADY—if you are?"

Tracy, clad in a bathing suit over which he had thrown a gayly colored robe, heard the merry voice with that indefinable feeling of exaltation that its every tone aroused in him. He walked to the window of his bedroom and looked out upon the sparkling waters of the Bay of Biscay. Fishermen were staggering under the strong breeze and raucous gulls were circling close inshore. The brilliant sunshine *Côte D'Or* almost made his eyes ache, accustomed as they were to the semi-gloom of his heavily shaded room. Tall trees were waving, birds were singing; in the street beyond his garden cabbies were indulging in the guttural drolleries of the Basque. *Bérets*, blue and red, bobbed along the sidewalk and there was even the clatter of an occasional pair of wooden shoes. There was a tiny donkey, incredibly burdened, but he staggered merrily up the steep incline of the Avenue Edouard Sept.

Merrily! That was the word that described everything in Biarritz—sea, sun, trees, people, animals—even the servants who had been included in his lease of the house in which he stood were always merry. Whenever one came upon them, one had the feeling that they had just reached the mirth-provoking point in a tale of exceptional flavor. The gardener sang at his work; the chauffeur screamed jests at the maids as

he polished fenders; passers-by hailed each other with enthusiasm; even stray curs seemed to wag their tails with an enthusiasm unknown in America.

And there, in the next room, her voice indicative of the impression that Basque gayety had made upon her, was his wife. Standing there, blinking at the sunshine, savoring the odors of a dozen different kinds of flowers, listening to the gay sounds from below, his heart was heavy.

Why should he be the only person—apparently—in all of southwestern France who was not gay? Why couldn't he adapt himself to a situation as well as Joyce? True, Europe was no novelty to him; he had traveled widely, and new scenes, new people, had little thrill to offer him. But he had never traveled in such charming companionship before, and every moment should have been blithe.

He had warned himself that he might fall in love with his wife; then he had assured himself that he could never fall in love again. . . . Well, he wasn't in love with her. He liked her, enjoyed her company, that was all. The feeling of shame that he had done an unworthy thing in marrying out of pique had left him. Then why—why was he downhearted, dispirited, miserable?

He reviewed their hasty departure from America. He had knocked down a gentleman named Rogan. Into the blow with which he had floored the unpossessing caller he had put all his rage against life, against Helen Wilson, against himself. Rogan had staggered to his feet, a policeman had rushed to the scene, and for a moment Tracy had visualized court rooms, more of that painful notoriety which irked him.

But Rogan had been thoroughly frightened, the policeman had been amenable to a ten dollar bill, and the incident had closed as abruptly as it had begun. Only—its memories had remained. What had this Rogan, this obvious product of an underworld which Tracy had read about but never glimpsed, to do with Joyce Carroll?

Tracy was a gentleman. Instinctively, when his furtive visitor had said that he could tell a few things about the woman Tracy had married, the newly-made husband had struck out viciously. Innate chivalry forbade that he should listen to any tale, or innuendo, or hint, about any woman whom he knew, and resentment was infinitely greater when he was asked to heed a story about his wife.

But chivalry, unfortunately, is rarely a lasting quality. It may last long enough to prevent us from action, but it cannot prevent us from thought. Doubt is an insidious thing, and cannot be banished by an effort of the will; it requires evidence—proof—to lay the ghost of suspicion.

Tracy had not mentioned Rogan's visit to Joyce. That was something impossible to him. He had married this girl, this waif whom he had rescued from starvation, without asking any questions as to her past. He could not, now that she was his wife, ever raise any questions as to what might have happened in the days before he knew her.

But he had assumed that she was what is known as a good woman. A glance at her seemed to prove that assumption. Further, girls with her beauty need never starve in a city like New York if they are will-

ing to trade their beauty for a price. She had not traded, and therefore—but there was Rogan.

Always the specter of the man whom he had knocked down rose between them. And yet, he asked himself as he stood in the window, did that matter? Did anything matter save that he was unhappy and might find surcease from unhappiness in—well, if not in her arms, at least in her companionship?

Not that he sulked, been depressed all the time. The flurry of embarkation; the excitement communicated to him by her excitement; the delicious feeling of intimacy the next morning when, knocking at her door to inquire as to her well-being, she had invited him in to breakfast in her cabin. The promenade that afternoon along the decks, when he had felt the envious eyes of men upon him. The actual furor she had created in the Ritz restaurant on the upper deck that evening. The casual acquaintances who had sought to turn acquaintanceship into quick intimacy. Had he the slightest doubt as to how Mrs. Laurence Tracy would be received by his friends, her shipboard reception would have dissipated those doubts.

Of course, he had sense enough to realize that a part of this interest was due to the fact that his broken engagement and subsequent marriage had been exploited by the press, but just the same Joyce's personality was such that it would banish unpleasant criticism. Not that he cared about that, he told himself, but it was pleasant to realize that she was the sort who would make people understand that a man might be swept off his feet at bare sight of her.

For, naturally decent and clean, he instantly regretted his first intention. He had wanted Helen to

be hurt, had wanted her friends to hide smiles and sneers at her approach. Now he realized that if people jeered at Helen, they would perhaps suspect that he had married out of pique, and such suspicions would work an injury—slight but real—to Joyce.

And he didn't want Joyce hurt! A thousand Rogans couldn't make him think evil of her. So, in the intimacy of their breakfasts together, enthralled by the sight of her in negligee, he would tell himself. And then, when she would laughingly order him from her bedroom, doubts would come back. After all, though they had undergone a marriage ceremony, they were not man and wife. Yet she suffered no embarrassment at intimacies which he had never indulged in with any other woman in his life.

He would be in her cabin and it would be time to go on deck for a stroll.

"Turn your back," she would order.

Obediently he would look the other way. There would be a swish of silk and she would tell him that he might look. The girl who, a moment ago, had been in a suit of pajamas, would now appear in a dinner dress. And she would announce the change, and make it, without any self-consciousness. Could a girl unaccustomed to masculine intimacy be as devoid of embarrassment under such conditions?

Had there been any obvious coquetry in her manner, in her voice, in her glance, he would have known how to answer the question. But he might have been her brother. . . . Perhaps, though he didn't think of this, the impersonality with which she regarded him might have been one of the underlying causes of his depression. . . .

The motor trip from Cherbourg to Paris; the quaint inn at Caen where they had lunched, and his amusement at her delight over the fat and bustling waiter, the fresh-baked crescents, her struggles with the atrocious coffee. Then Paris; their apartment at the Crillon, overlooking the Place Concorde, her joy at the theater where she didn't understand a single word, the avidity with which she began to brush up schoolgirl French, the shopping, the luncheon at Fontainebleau, the trip to Versailles, the Latin Quarter. . . . The Paris-Madrid express to Biarritz, the sudden decision to rent a villa, the adoration—instant—of the servants for their new mistress . . . And now, two mornings after their arrival, their decision to go bathing.

Biarritz had entranced her. Why they had chosen this particular spot Tracy didn't know, except perhaps because he had never been there. But they had both loved it, been entranced by the scenery and climate, and—well, here they were, ensconced in a charming villa, waited upon by servants of a deftness unknown in America, and he was dressed for the beach and so, he presumed, was she. And her gay voice was hurrying him. Through the half-open door that when shut constituted an impassable barrier, her voice floated, and enwrapped him in subtle promise, lifted him to heights from which he knew he would drop the moment her voice ceased or her presence was not with him.

"All ready," he called. "May I come in?"

"By all means," she answered.

He passed through the communicating door and stopped dead at sight of her.

"Am I—is it—too, daring?" she asked.

On a chair lay a carelessly tossed beach gown, but she stood there attired in a one-piece suit that revealed nearly all of her body and that showed every line where it hid the flesh.

Tracy had seen his wife in negligee; he had seen her in pajamas. For that matter, modern street or evening dresses reveal practically all of a woman's body. He had known that her figure was delightful, but he was not prepared for the utterly enchanting revelation that met his eyes now. To begin with, she was not, in bathing slippers, quite as tall as he had fancied, but she was even slimmer where slimness was desirable and rounder where roundness is no detriment. Her slender legs, with the dimpled knees, the flat young torso that rounded sweetly into a definition of femininity above, the round, proud throat, the graceful arms, the gentle shoulders—topped by a roguish red béret set on her black hair—she was too ineffably entrancing. His eyes, wide with ardor, told her as much.

"I take it, without too great vanity, I trust, that I'm not offensive to the eye," she laughed.

"You're a delight," he muttered.

"And not too bold?" she asked.

Upon an unshapely woman her scanty costume would have been inevitably bold. But upon her it was the only possible dress for swimming.

He shook his head. She became suddenly self-conscious and picked up her dressing gown. He took it from her and placed it about her shoulders. An impulse which he many times restrained conquered him now. His hands tightened upon her shoulders,

twisted her around, and his lips greedily sought hers.

He had dreamed of doing this many times in the past ten days or so. Though he told himself that he would never yield to inclination he knew that he deceived himself, knew that sooner or later he would do this very thing. And he wondered, as a man must, how she would receive his first advance.

Would she struggle? Would she yield? Would she become indignant, embarrassed, or what? But he had never anticipated her reactions as they would really be.

For the body that he drew to him seemed suddenly turned to marble. Pliable marble, if such a thing is conceivable, but cold and stony. She made not the slightest resistance, but the shoulders he gripped were suddenly cold, and the lips he kissed were as unresponsive as the lips of a painting. Even the eyes into which he gazed—and which did not turn away from his own blazing gaze—were as expressionless, as emotionless, as unaroused as those of any statue.

Reluctantly, shamefacedly, he released her.

"I'm sorry," he muttered.

"Oh, no, you're not," she said.

"I—I couldn't help it," he stammered.

"Oh, yes, you could," she told him coolly. "Well, is it over?"

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"My words are clear, I think," she retorted. "I mean—is this ended?"

"Is what ended?"

"What has just occurred," she explained.

Beneath her quiet contempt he grew angry.

"My God, you let me into your room for break-

fast—you let me see you half clad—and now, in that bathing suit—I'm only human, after all."

"And not very original," she said. "I suppose Adam said to Eve that he was only human, after all. In other words, she was the only woman around, just as I'm the only woman around—"

"That isn't so," he stammered.

"No?" Her eyes derided him. "I suppose I should be flattered at that. With half the demi-monde of Europe in the Casinos here, I should be overjoyed that you selected me. But, of course, having paid for me, having clothed and fed and sheltered me, and *being only human*—"

"I won't offend again," he said.

"Until the next time that you feel like it," she mocked.

Her contempt enraged him now.

"After all," he sneered, "you knew perfectly well that sooner or later it would come to this."

"That is quite true," she admitted.

"Then why, if you knew it was inevitable, be angry?" he demanded.

"Does the fact that a thing is inevitable make it any more pleasant?" she inquired. "Of course I knew what you'd do. You say you're only human. Well, I say that you're only a man, and from a man a woman expects only one thing. You paid for me—therefore I belonged to you."

"I don't feel that way at all," he tried to assure her.

"You mean that, being a man, you can't be honest even with yourself," she said. "You feel exactly that way, but remnants of chivalry constrain you to deny that feeling."

"I've said it won't happen again," he said.

"*You've* said it. But now I say it," she told him. "Because the next time, I'll leave you. Oh, I don't suppose that's much of a threat. After all, I came with you willingly enough, took what you had—now I'm going to be honest. I—I'm not a fool. I've met men. I—knew perfectly this would happen. I—I'm going to be honest as few women would be with you—I wanted it to happen. Because I wanted to know whether or not I could—please don't make me go on," she ended abruptly.

"You needn't," he said. "I think—you're fine to—be so honest. I'm sorry that—I'm so distasteful—"

"You're not," she interrupted. "It's only that—you see, if you were in love with me—really in love—you're my husband, after all. And if you cared—terribly—I'd pay. But if you don't care—I wanted to know if I—could—well, I can't. Don't make me—don't try to persuade me to give what—what would save us nothing in the giving and the taking."

"You'll not have to leave me," he said. "And—I do love you."

Her misty black eyes brightened incredibly. Her lips curled deliciously.

"You're sweet," she cried. "You—take the meanness, the hurt—out of everything. You didn't have to say that—that you loved me. I know you don't—and don't want you to, but—I'm glad you said it. You wanted to save my pride and—shall we go bathing?"

## CHAPTER XI

THEY hailed a *fiacre* outside their walled garden, and the cabbie beamed upon them. Here was youth, youth arrayed in dressing gowns and bathing suits, out for an hour of play in the surf, and the cabbie approved. The man was young and good-looking; the girl was young and beautiful. This was life as it should be lived, and the cabbie approved. People like these young Americans, who lived in such a magnificent villa, would be generous with old Antoine, and would enable his dream of a farm back there in the Pyrenees to come nearer realization.

He cracked his whip with a great flourish, hurled incredible Basque insults at his bony old horse, and they dashed down the steep hill toward the ocean at an unbelievable pace. Joyce, terrified at the down-hill speed, and not knowing that every *fiacre* in Biarritz is equipped with powerful brakes, shrank toward Tracy, and the very moment seemed to assure him of forgiveness.

Damn it, what a beast he was! A girl as fine and sweet and trusting as Joyce . . . Then doubting common sense returned to him. Everyone knows that favors withheld assume greater value than favors easily granted, and perhaps Joyce knew exactly what she was doing in the very moment that he was terming her noble, wonderful. . . .

The vision of Rogan obtruded itself and the arm

with which he held the frightened girl had nothing of ardor in its embrace. She seemed to sense the change in him and struggled back into her own side of the seat.

"Silly of me—I guess we're all right," she managed to laugh.

But her laugh didn't ring true, and Tracy, a windmill in the conflicting winds of emotion, veered again toward complete sympathy and understanding. But one wouldn't say to one's wife—a wife that had been acquired as strangely as this wife had been—that one minute one had faith in her and that the faith was lost and regained every moment or so. So Tracy said nothing.

To an old woman in front of the Casino they surrendered beach robes and slippers, and ventured into the waves. Life guards waved trumpets when they were not blowing them and an Englishman volunteered an explanation to Tracy.

"Too many people drowned here each season," he said. "If the trumpet blows it means that someone has gone out too far, and will be arrested if he doesn't come in nearer shore. The wave indicates the direction to take."

Joyce laughed gayly. "And the only way to avoid arrest is to be drowned?"

The Englishman grinned. His brown eyes beamed approval upon the slim American girl. Tracy felt a sudden jealousy. Why should any other man be permitted to gaze upon Joyce? Damn! He was a fool. To hide his chagrin—he had an absurd belief that she could read his inner thoughts from his outer expression—he dashed into the surf, swam under a

huge roller and came up to hear the blasts of a trumpet and to see two life guards frantically waving. He glanced over his shoulder. No one else out beyond himself. Well, the silly fools must mean himself.

But one didn't care to be arrested. So he started to swim inshore. And then, laughing at his elbow, he found Joyce.

"Fearful current," she said.

Tracy had already discovered this. Things that were alive seemed pulling at his legs, his waist. His face whitened and he turned with chagrin as he noted Joyce's quick alarm.

"Listen," she said quickly, "flatten out. Get on *top* of the water. It won't pull them so much."

She herself, he noted, was at complete ease. He tried to follow her advice, felt that quick touch of panic which may seize upon the most hardy swimmer, and fought it down. But she—he was right; she knew his inner thoughts—touched his elbow. Her hand slipped under his chest.

It was all over in a second. Somehow they evaded the gripping current, were in an eddy, were being rushed to shore in a tumbling hilarious surf that seemed to take great joy in the fact that it had just frightened a couple of human beings.

She hadn't saved his life; he'd been in no real danger. But that touch upon his chest, that seemed to straighten him out had restored his confidence, or his pride, or his strength. She'd done nothing at all, really, but she had shown that she would have been ready to do much.

After the angry life guards had been soothed by many francs and had departed to warn other rash

bathers that the Bay of Biscay permits no liberties, Tracy looked at his wife.

"Anything that I ever did for you—you've repaid," he said.

"I was dying," she reminded him.

"I might very well have been drowned," he said.

"Nonsense," she retorted.

"You don't mind my being grateful?" he ventured.

"I don't want anything from you I don't deserve," she said. Then she laughed. "Aren't we being a little bit dramatic? I happen to be a very good swimmer—I didn't know if you were accustomed to surf, and—well, I touched you—just to show you that—well, you weren't alone."

He eyed her curiously.

"That," he said, "seems to me to be the essence of marriage: that one should know that one wasn't alone."

Her forehead wrinkled for a moment, and he knew that he had trodden upon dangerous ground. But her brows smoothed out again.

"Shall we try it once more?" she asked.

This time they contented themselves with the rollers inshore and were rewarded for their caution by a beaming smile from the life guard as they finally emerged from the water.

Back in Resaurie, the villa which they had rented, Tracy, rubbing himself dry in his bedroom, glanced at the door that separated his room from hers.

It was half open and he could hear a maid jabbering in excitable and barbarous French—all their servants were Basque and spoke a *patois* hardly understandable even to so good a French scholar as Tracy—and his

heart leaped. She had not thought it necessary to close her door while she dressed. It was possibly a crude way to inform him that this morning's incident was forgotten, but surely it was more delicate than any speech could have been.

"How about cocktails at the Bar Basque, luncheon somewhere and a fling at the shimmy tables later?" he called.

"It all sounds too wonderful," she called back, "especially the shimmy. What is shimmy?"

"A wicked and reprehensible gambling game," he explained. "Do you ever gamble?"

"I never have—with money," she replied.

He knew what she meant; she'd gambled with life itself, and—there was pathos as well as courage in her words.

"Well, we'll take a few *milles* with us and try to win the season's expenses," he laughed. "Hurry up."

"Hurrying," she answered.

She kept her word. Fifteen minutes later their chauffeur left them before the Bar Basque, a tiny restaurant in front of which were placed a dozen tables. They were crowded with laughing folk, Spanish, South American, English, and one or two Americans.

One of the latter leaped to his feet as Tracy and his wife alighted from their car.

"Larry Tracy," he cried.

His too-great enthusiasm grated on the ears of Joyce. She looked at this man greeting her husband as though they were devoted brothers reunited after a long separation.

She saw a man too fat for his years, too amiable

for his expression, and too well-mannered for his obvious breeding. Tracy, she fancied, mastered a quick reluctance and then presented him.

"Mr. Weedon," he said.

Weedon bent from the waist; moist lips pressed upon her hand. But before she could communicate, even by a glance, with Tracy, her distaste for this new acquaintance, they were in the midst of a laughing cosmopolitan group, that whirled and eddied until a wave deposited her upon a chair beside a merry-eyed, red-haired man who, surprisingly, was a Spaniard.

"I thought," she said, after the first cocktail, "that all Spaniards were dark."

The Marquis de Valdemagara—his friends, he almost instantly told her, called him Billy—smiled gayly.

"Most of us are—but we are an affectionate people, Mrs. Tracy. And there were many gallant Irish in Wellington's army. I would hate to think—with my so-red hair and blue eyes—that my great-great grandmother had failed in hospitality to some homesick Irish officer."

His gayety was infectious. He had a yacht; he was a friend of Deganne, the great Spanish portrait painter, who had a villa back in the Pyrenees.

"Deganne would adore to paint you, Mrs. Tracy," said Valdemagara. "And you have never seen a bullfight. But listen—Pedro Cordobas—the great Portuguese—he kills from the back of his horse—he performs next Sunday at San Sebastián. No more. It is settled. In my car. Lunch at the top of the hill—you have never seen Spain—you will love it. But this is only Wednesday. There is to-night, all day

to-morrow, Friday, Saturday—the Reserve opens to-night. You and your husband will do me the so great honor to be my guests at a dinner dance to-night. Ah—then that, too, is settled. And then we shall arrange for the rest of the week. This afternoon—I was cursed at birth, I think, or I should have no engagements from the time I met you—this afternoon unfortunately I am engaged. But the rest of the week, the month, the year——”

“Billy is in love again,” a merry voice said.

Joyce turned to meet a lovely blonde American's glance.

“I'm not jealous,” said the girl. “I've always told Billy that my type wasn't suited to his, but—Billy, you needn't have taken my word for it.”

“Ah, Jeanne,” said the Marquis, “it is not your word—it is your command. See,” he turned to Joyce, “Madame Mazell tells me, over and over again, that she is unsuited to me. I find you—who are eminently suited—and—I hesitate at this; Castilian gallantry warns me, yet—my Jeanne is already jealous.”

The pretty blonde smiled ravishingly. “Not jealous, Mrs. Tracy. Just the wee-est bit hurt, but—if you take Billy from me—there still remains your husband, Mr. Tracy,” she called, “fight your way through this throng and solace me for the defection of a suitor.”

“You ask me to believe the impossible,” replied Larry. “But only the incredible could bring me a summons from you, so—I come.”

Not too gracefully turned, thought Joyce, but a lot better than most men could have done. She felt a strange pride in her long-limbed, clean-eyed husband

as he battered his way through laughing obstructors and gained the side of the lovely Mrs. Mazell. He could acquit himself well in the light lists of gayety, this husband of hers. That he had inner decencies she had known from the moment she met him, and she had learned that he could be merry, but it was good to realize that other people liked him at sight. Then her black eyes grew grave. What difference did it make to her whether other people liked him?

The cocktail party broke up soon, with arrangements for the evening all concluded and Joyce and Larry strolled across the plaza to the *Café de Paris*. There they lunched leisurely and Tracy told her something about the people whom she had just met.

Paul Weedon was a college mate, who now lived abroad, surviving, Larry suspected, by ways rather devious. Their acquaintanceship was slight, and Tracy disliked the man. Jeanne Mazell was married to an old friend of Tracy's, an elderly man who took a great delight in his wife's harmless coquettices, and tremendous pride in the fact that scores of men professed to adore her. Valdemagara was most highly placed in the nobility of Spain, a gentleman, educated at an American university, extremely rich, with a reputation for being a great lover that Tracy did not think he deserved.

"He's a bit too decent for all that," he commented.

The others were just drifters, friendly, amiable, idling folk who, Tracy hoped, would not bore Joyce.

"Bored? I was never so excited in my life," she told him. "When do we gamble?"

"Right after luncheon, if you like," he promised.

He kept his word, and they strolled over to the

Casino, applied for cards, received them, and entered the salon. Tracy explained the mysteries of *chemin de fer* to his wife, placed her at a table where the limit was small, and strolled himself with no thought of selfishness, to the "big" table. There he bought himself a bank, ran it three times, passed it, rebought it, and settled down to the serious business of gambling.

He was no addict, but whatever he did he did very seriously. The business of gambling was to win, so he bent every energy, every faculty, to winning. After half an hour he strolled over to Joyce's table. He had been unlucky, despite his feverish attention to the game, but Joyce had had the proverbial beginner's luck.

"Ahead?" he asked.

"I've won forty thousand francs," she breathlessly told him.

"Good for you. Hang onto it," he advised. Then he returned to his own table in response to the pleas of an attendant who informed him that the bank had come around to his place.

He sat down, and as he did so he saw that a woman, obviously of the *demi-monde*, was bending over Joyce's shoulder, speaking to her. He saw Joyce look up, apparently speak to the woman, rise and walk out of the salon. He frowned. Why on earth should Joyce go off with a strange woman? He had a phenomenal run, the bank passing six times, and he had won fifty thousand francs on this bank alone, when fortune turned. So he pocketed his profits and walked toward Joyce's table.

Her seat was still vacant, but as he neared the table she entered the salon and came toward him.

"Stuffy here. I went out for a breath of air," she told him. He saw that she was a trifle pale.

"Who was your friend?" he asked.

"Friend? What friend?"

"The woman who spoke to you—with whom you went out," he replied.

"Went out? I didn't go out with anyone. A woman spoke to me—asked me to lend her some money to continue playing with—you told me they'd all try that—but I didn't go out with her."

Larry stared at her. She *had* gone out with a woman, and with a woman who was quite obviously what she was. He had watched Joyce as she went, had noticed that she and the woman chatted all the way to the door.

Well, it was nothing. How could it be more than nothing? He changed the subject. He'd been mistaken; he must be mistaken. Joyce was not the kind to lie.

He had dismissed their chauffeur, so they took a *facre*. Arriving at their villa, he found he had no small money.

"Let me have ten francs, Joyce, will you? I want to pay the cabby."

"I'm sorry. I cannot do it."

"But you were forty thousand ahead," he cried.

"I lost it all," she said.

Now he knew that she lied, lied deliberately. At that small game, it would have been a physical impossibility for her to have lost a fraction of forty thousand francs in the few seconds that had elapsed from the time he left her side until she left the room.

But why was she lying?

## CHAPTER XII

**H**E WAS not stingy; in fact, he held money rather more lightly than most people who have never needed to work to acquire it. For, difficult of credence though it may be, and not at all in consonance with the shirt sleeves to shirt sleeves axiom, people who have inherited money are far less generous than those who have earned it. This is because those who have inherited wealth realize that their importance is predicated solely upon their possessions, whereas those who have earned money are wont to believe that their achievements make them important, and these latter also have confidence in their ability to make more money.

That Joyce should have lost or given away forty thousand francs would not have mattered to Larry. But that she should lie about the affair was something to arouse indignation. And that indignation would have been translated into instant resentful speech but for the fact that the lie held something of mystery in its brazenness. Those vague suspicions to which Rogan's interrupted tale had given birth were revivified now.

"Lost it all?" he said. He was proud of his light tone and his bantering smile. "What a gambler you are. Well, then, our cabby profits by your loss."

He gave the driver a fifty franc note, and, of course, the man had no change. He drove off gayly, pray-

ing his Basque gods that they would send other mad Americans his way.

Larry threw open the gate and they passed into the villa grounds. He felt his wife's eyes upon him.

"I—I'm sorry," she ventured.

"Sorry? What about?" he asked.

"The money," she replied.

He glanced at her. "It was yours," he said shortly.

"I know, but—after all your generosity——"

"That tennis court could do with a bit of rolling."

He changed the subject abruptly. "Ever play?"

"I'm afraid I'm rusty," she said.

"So am I—haven't had a racquet in my hand for two years. Want to try—to-morrow?"

"I'd love it," she enthusiastically said.

He stopped to speak to the gardener, and when he resumed his interrupted progress to the house she had disappeared. So—she played tennis. Well, nothing surprising in that, was there? She could not always have been on the verge of destitution. Those shabby clothes she had worn when he first saw her had been well-made, had obviously been expensive when purchased. And anyway, he reminded himself with a touch of self-contempt at his own snobbery, tennis wasn't a game played only by people of affluence. Probably she played golf, maybe, for all he knew, could drive a motor, or an airplane. How did he know what she could do, or might have done?

He was in his bedroom now, and through the partly opened door he could hear water running in a tub, could hear her halting efforts at conversation with the maid.

"Larry," she called.

It was the first time she had called him by his nickname. Indeed, he could not remember that she had ever given him any title when she addressed him. He had called her Joyce, but it seemed to him that she had carefully avoided any salutation to him.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Which is which? Does *froid* mean hot and *chaud* mean cold?"

"The other way around," he laughed.

"No wonder I was parboiled this morning," she responded. "*Froid*—cold. *Chaud*—hot. Much obliged."

Light-hearted, gay, inconsequential—this was a different woman from the girl he had picked up, starving from the bench on the park side of Fifth Avenue less than a month ago. Could any woman, even the most superb actress in the world, have just lied and committed deceit and be as gay as she now was?

It didn't seem possible. But there were many impossibilities about her; or, at least, many incredibilities. There was no question about the fact of her having lied to him a few minutes ago. After all, some people have active consciences and others have none at all. She might very well be of this latter class. A lie uttered and accepted was a thing promptly to be forgotten with a girl like her.

A girl like her! He sat abruptly down and began to ponder the situation, and as he did so a wry smile curled his lips not too pleasantly. There were just as many varieties of fool in the world as there were varieties of a highly advertised pickle, and he had been all of them.

But there had been a certain extenuation for his

first foolishness. At least, there had been the cheap extenuation of pique and hurt vanity. But to continue with this farce, this mockery of a sacrament, was impossible save under one condition. That condition was that he should fall in love with his wife.

Now, assure himself though he might that there was no danger of this, he knew that there was grave danger. He had not been inspired to this morning's kiss by the mere sight of her displayed beauty. True, she had been provocative in her beach garb, but that had not been enough to make him seize her, press his lips against her impassive mouth.

He was by way of falling in love with her. His jaw set as he made this admission to himself. Well, before this beginning descent become an actual tumble, he would find out something about Joyce.

He couldn't ask her. He couldn't go to her and say that he thought it was time he knew something of her. And the only reason he couldn't do this was because there was only one question he wished to ask. Disguise it as he might, the fact would be patent, with his first words, that he wanted to know whether or not she was a virtuous woman.

Damn it! that's what he wanted to know, and *all* he wanted to know. Why had he let silly chivalrous scruples prevent him from listening to that man Rogan? After all, a girl who marries a complete stranger is not like a girl whom one had known all one's life. Instinctively one knows that certain women are all they may be demanded. But strangers—marriage was a serious business, and if he had any thought of making this farce of his a real thing, then he should know, had every right to know, to ascertain from any

source whatsoever, everything about Joyce that a husband might wish to know about a wife.

He had overlooked an opportunity with Rogan. Well, there was another opportunity right here in Biarritz. Joyce wouldn't have given money to an utter stranger; or, if she had done so, she would not have found it necessary to lie about it.

She had left the gambling table with a woman; she had returned minus some forty-odd thousand francs. Why? Well, maybe the woman in question would tell why. And he had every right to ask. It wasn't as though he had married—well, Helen Wilson. In that case he would undergo torture before permitting anyone else to become privy to his doubts of his own wife. But a stranger, whose actions were mysterious and who lied about them . . .

So he salved his conscience for intending to do a shabby thing. He called to Joyce that he was going for a stroll, and the pretty Basque maid with the harsh voice appeared in the communicating doorway to inform him that madame was in the bath. Sounds of splashing and a voice raised in a surprisingly sweet contralto would have given him the same information.

"Tell Madame that I'll be back in an hour," he said.

Then, guiltily, like a small boy bent on petty meanness, he ran downstairs and out into the garden. As he emerged therefrom to the street the crack of a whip, a hoarse cry, and the clattering of hoofs stopped him. The cabby to whom he had given the unprecedented fee of fifty francs had been lurking in wait. Did Monsieur desire him? He could drive Monsieur

to San Sebastián and back for the sheer joy it would give him. Behold the fastest, sturdiest horse in all the Basque country. But no? Monsieur preferred to walk. *Dieu*, but all Americans were mad. *Eh, bien*, to-morrow, perhaps?

Down the steep hill to the sea, the action of walking somehow enabling him to divert his mind from thoughts of the thing he was about to do, Larry hastily strode. He came at length to the Municipal Casino, entered, checked his hat and entered the *salon de chemin de fer*.

An attendant recognized the American gentleman who lost rather debonairly earlier to-day. He accosted Larry. Monsieur Tracy—he had consulted the register and found out Larry's name—wished to play? Ah, but a seat would be found for him instantly at the big table.

Larry waved aside his friendly offer. He smiled inwardly at the man's courtesy. The season was young and the big fish had not swum into the net so attractively laid out, so men like himself, who could lose a few hundred dollars with equanimity, were to be courted and flattered and cajoled into taking part in the games. Casinos must live, after all.

He strolled about the room, taking it in more thoroughly than this afternoon. The smaller tables, where five pitiful francs was the minimum stake, held his attention briefly. Here were shabby Italians, Spaniard nondescripts, awaiting each *coup* with a dreadful intensity. Men and women, of obviously low professions, almost spat at each other in rage at winnings or losings, only to offer cheery encouragement a moment later. A woman, once beautiful, addressed

Larry. Just ten francs that she might continue playing. . . . A man, furtive for all his youth, wished a cigarette. . . .

He turned away disheartened, momentarily miserable. Gambling was fun; it was all very well for those who could afford it to pass away a few hours risking their money on the turn of a card. But fun may also be vice, and surely these degraded folk were addicts to a vice as deadly, and as insidious in its beginnings, as any drug.

The woman he sought, the woman with whom Joyce had held conversation, was not in the room. So he left, glad that he had not encountered her, happy that fortunate circumstances had prevented him doing a caddish thing.

And then, at the *boule* table, in the outer room, he came upon her. Six deep the townspeople stood around the *boule* table, indulging in the only form of gambling permitted to them in the Casino. For the wary French do not desire that the natives of their towns shall be *mulcted* by the savage percentage of *chemin de fer*. Nevertheless, the public must be permitted some pleasure, so *boule*, at small stakes, with an even higher percentage, is permitted to those who dwell in the shadow of the great Casino.

Eying the rubber ball eagerly as it bounded about the table were people whose poverty was apparent. Shabby little shopgirls were risking francs . . .

About the woman with whom Joyce had left the salon this afternoon the crowd stood ten deep. She was playing maximums, and the fact that the maximum was only a louis, or less than a dollar, made no difference. This outer room stood for poor people's

pleasures, and these are necessarily cheaper than rich people's fun.

Win or lose, the attitude of Joyce's "friend," as Larry angrily termed her, was impeccable. When she purchased fresh chips, she peeled *mille* notes off a fat roll with cheery insouciance. Joyce's money, Larry knew.

But how had this woman, this hard-faced harridan, acquired money from Larry Tracy's wife?

The woman looked up and met Larry's eyes. Had there been the faintest flicker of recognition in her eyes, Tracy would have left the room instantly, and abandoned forever the thought of questioning her. But he was, to her, an utter stranger. He knew that she was not acting. But if she didn't know that he was the husband of the woman from whom she had obtained money this afternoon . . . There could be no doubt of it. Hadn't Joyce admitted that the woman asked for money? And now the woman was, for her kind, rich.

He lingered, watching the player. Again, and then once more, she looked up and met his glance. Then, on the fourth time that their glances encountered each other, the faintest inviting smile flickered on the woman's lips.

Here was youth, and American youth, and being in funds was no deterrent to the desire for further enrichment. She suddenly cashed in, and favored Larry with more than a flicker of a smile now. She gave him the warmest encouragement, and then, as he still stood there, she approached him and spoke.

"Hot work," she said in English. Her accent, he recognized, was of Manhattan.

"It didn't seem to bother you," he said.

She shrugged in patent imitation of her Latin sisters.

"Not much. Had a bit of luck to-day. But still —it makes a girl thirsty."

A *girl*. She was well into her forties, Larry thought. Still, the life she led did not keep women young. Only the greatly successful courtesans, sought by the great of the world, keep youth beyond the early thirties.

"We might have some champagne," he suggested.

He could almost read her mind. This was a bit of real luck. A rich young American who suggested champagne in the first moment of acquaintance. . . .

"That would be fine," she assented.

He led her to a table in the tiny bar, a bar modeled upon a Frenchman's idea of what the old-time American bar used to be, but achieved a better resemblance to the still extant lunch counter.

"How long you been over here?" she asked.

"A few weeks," he answered.

"Know anyone?" she inquired.

The waiter uncorked the bottle with solemnity. He preciously permitted the liquid to enter the glasses. The woman gulped hers as though it had been whisky.

"Not many people," he replied.

"Well, I can show you this town," she promised.

"You know everyone, of course," he ventured.

"Oh, nearly everyone," she replied. She didn't wait for him, but refilled her glass herself.

"You had luck to-day," he reminded her.

"I'll say I did," she boasted. Two glasses of champagne loosened her tongue.

"Bank pass for you several times?"

She shook her head. "Never have luck at the tables. Just ran into an old friend, that's all."

"Old friends don't always bring good luck," he sagely observed. "Sometimes—"

"This one did," said the woman. Her lips clamped tightly on her words, and the viciousness that her life engendered sprang revelatorily into her eyes. "This one had damn good reason to bring me luck."

Tracy felt a sickening sensation in the pit of his stomach. But it was not because he knew he was about to learn something concerning Joyce. It was because he had just discovered something about himself. He had learned that he was the type of person who is willing to seek dirt in dirty places, the kind of man who, not content with his observations, will ask questions about a woman.

Not from revelation about Joyce, but from revelation about himself, he suddenly fled.

"Sorry—don't feel well—another time—" He gasped the words as he threw a hundred franc note on the table to cover the cost of the wine, and almost ran from the little bar.

He recovered his hat and stick and made his hasty way out into the fresh air. He gulped it in. Behind him was uncleanness, filth—yet he was of that uncleanness, himself. God forgive Joyce if there were shameful things in her past, but would God forgive him for being untrue to his own code? Well, thank heaven, he had at the last moment withdrawn. He hadn't been low enough to ask the ultimate question.

## CHAPTER XIII

J OYCE, according to her maid, was asleep when he reached Resaurie so, though it was still rather early, he decided to change now. Bathed and in his dinner clothes, he awaited her awakening. And as he sat in his room, trying to concentrate on the pages of a book, he made a resolve. Dr. Blanchard's word came back to him; he saw again the physician's indignation with him for taking advantage of Joyce's poverty and weakened condition and hurrying her into marriage.

After all, there were two sides to this matter. What right had he to expect anything from Joyce? She had told him nothing about herself, therefore there could be no issue of truth or falsehood between them. He had married her for an unworthy reason. That, learning to care for her, he should demand of her all those things which husbands demand of wives was an injustice. This was no wooed and courted maiden who had paraded before her suitor all those treasures of youth and beauty and grace and virtue—in his mind he accented this last—as maidens have from time immemorial. She had pretended nothing, promised nothing.

Therefore—and this he vowed—no word from any other person would influence his judgment of her. Whatever knowledge might come to him of her would come *from* her and from no one else. No matter

what she might be, he at least would try to live up to his own ideal of what he should be.

Somehow, decent resolutions make the past seem unimportant, the present pleasant, and the future almost roseate. He was quite gay when she knocked upon his door and, in response to his invitation, entered the room.

She had taste, no doubt of that. The silver-sequined frock held a most deceiving simplicity of line. He realized, not for the first time, that whatever else Joyce might be, she was a woman of discernment in those matters which are important to her sex. She knew that cut was more important than material.

"You will be," he complimented clumsily, "the belle of the ball to-night."

She curtsied deeply. "I *do* look rather well," she admitted. There was not the slightest vanity in her remark. It would, Tracy realized, have been silly for her to pretend embarrassment at his compliment. She must know that she was lovely, and it would have been a cheap mock modesty for her to deny it.

"But," she straightened up to add, "I shall have competition. Mrs. Mazell is quite the loveliest thing I ever looked at."

He shook his head. "There can never be competition between a blonde and a brunette, if the two have sense. Each acts as a foil—"

"Where did you learn these matters?" she laughed.

"Did you and Jeanne enter into an alliance or not?" he smiled.

Her upper lip pursed deliciously.

"You frighten me—you know too much—see too much—for a man."

"Then I'm right?" he insisted.

"Mrs. Mazell and I—well, we understand each other," she admitted.

"Devils," he said.

"What do you mean?" she asked in obviously feigned surprise.

"Without a word—by a glance or an intonation—you divided between you all the males at the Bar Basque to-day. To-night you'll make the division definite. And, of course, the men—even husbands—have nothing to say about it."

"Do you mind?" Her wish to please was patent.  
"I mean—the Marquis——"

"You know already, of course, exactly when the Marquis will say such and such, try this or that——"

She shook her head. "I can tell you what he'll say, but he'll never *try*——"

"Sorry. I didn't mean to imply anything unflattering," he said.

"Of course you didn't. But you implied so many flattering things. . . ." She paused and eyed him almost wistfully. "Do you know," she went on, "that to meet men—charming men like Billy Valdemagara—who—want to play—and don't want to be serious—just wish to be amiable and agreeable and can't help being charming—well, it's nice."

"I'm glad you like my friends," he said. He wanted to bite his tongue for its clumsy stilted way of phrasing things. Must he always be self-conscious before this girl? He felt angry with her. She should be the one to feel self-conscious, not he.

"I do. And I hope they like me. I know they

like you. But I hope that Jeanne Mazell doesn't like you too well."

"Now what on earth do you mean by that?" he cried.

She pursed her lips. "One can be jealous, you know, even where one doesn't love."

Then she laughed outright at him. "My dear, you take life too seriously."

"You think so? Well, I won't take it so to-night," he promised.

"I'm glad of that. For this is my first—party in—well, it seems in all my life," she told him.

"Then I shall try to make it a happy one," he promised.

Funny, he said to himself, as they descended to the garden, that in her presence one forgot all low and mean suspicions. If she used obvious blandishments—but she didn't. She was, he thought, the most natural thing he'd ever met. Why, even on that starving afternoon on Fifth Avenue, her every word had been natural, been the only possible word to be uttered under such circumstances.

The Reserve was situated at St. Jean de Luz, fifteen or twenty kilometers away from San Sebastián and toward the Spanish border. Through a soft and starry night, with frequent glimpses of a whitely gleaming surf, they raced, until, sometime after nine, they arrived at the popular restaurant.

They were among the later arrivals, and groups of people, cocktail glasses in hand, hailed them excitedly. A new beauty—word had gone about the summer colony—had arrived in Biarritz, and every woman appraised Joyce jealously and men fought for pres-

entation. For beauty is a cult abroad, and Americans yield themselves to its sway as readily as the most romantic Latin.

They were hardly within the precincts of the restaurant when Joyce was separated from her husband. Billy Valdemagara constituted himself instantly her cavalier.

"You will," he instantly insisted, "be eternally faithful to me?"

"But naturally," said Joyce, "until, of course, I meet someone more attractive."

"That," said the Spaniard grandiloquently, "is impossible. Me, I am the sort of man whom women adore. Ah, you smile. But don't you see? You wonder now why women should adore me—wonder and curiosity are the same thing. So you will be curious about me for—oh, forever, still wondering at what there is to adore in me. You will never learn and so—"'

He was *nice*. Of course, it was nonsense, trifling nothings, but—*nice*.

His oddly freckled face assumed great gravity.

"I always prove my friendship at the start," he said. "I would warn you against your husband."

His voice was so serious that she was genuinely startled.

"Why, what do you mean?"

"The man," said the Marquis, "is patently charming. Otherwise how could he have won so beautiful a creature as yourself? Charming men are notoriously faithless, fickle, inwardly cruel—"

"Are you all those things, too?" she interrupted.

He beamed upon her. He turned to the group about them.

"My friends—the Basque country's latest and most lovely arrival has told me that I am charming. I ask you, my faithful and devoted ones, to drink a toast to me, Billy Valdemagara, *charming* Billy Valdemagara."

It was *fun*. Oh, maybe childish, but—*fun*. Only when Weedon drew her apart for a moment, brought his oily countenance too close to hers, did fun depart. Few, she suddenly realized, could play at flirtation gracefully. When those unfitted attempted the game, it became sordid and ugly. She despised Weedon with an instinctive and instantaneous contempt.

But the Marquis was in no mood to let any rival monopolize her for more than a moment. He neatly cut her out from Weedon and in a moment she was on the dance floor with him.

Larry, engaged in gay controversy with Jeanne Mazell, saw her float by in the arms of Billy. His jaw dropped. He knew that she was graceful, but he had not realized that she was superb in movement. Jeanne laughed.

"I let her have the Marquis—that isn't fair—I couldn't have held Billy. Those redheads love black-haired people—but I didn't debate the matter, and you know I didn't, Larry. Here's the best beau in Biarritz, and I surrendered him without a struggle, and Larry, you know I could defend my own, now, don't you?"

"Jeanne," he laughed, withdrawing his gaze from Joyce by a visible effort, "few women could hope to compete with you."

"Thank you, angel," she smiled. "But when I deeded over Billy Valdemagara, it was on the distinct understanding that I was to acquire you in exchange. But you, my simple-souled man, are in love with your wife. Larry Tracy, you annoy me. You've been married a month or so, haven't you? You've had time enough to discover flaws, frailties in perfection, and—er—you haven't paid me a compliment in five minutes."

"Jeanne," he began, "only my deep regard for your husband——"

She interrupted him with a laugh. "Go, you poor man, and dance with your wife." She detained him a moment with a light touch. "And I don't blame you. Larry—she's exquisite."

Well, Jeanne Mazell gave affection sparingly to women. The cosmopolitan colony of which Jeanne was leader would take Joyce to their hearts. But meantime he would like to hold her against his own heart, dance with her. . . .

He cut in on Valdemagara. The red-haired Spaniard glared at him.

"My God, has there ever been such *gaucherie*?" He appealed to all within hearing. "A *husband* cutting in on his *wife*! Larry Tracy, there is a touch of the *bourgeois* about you from which my Castilian blood shrinks." He bowed over Joyce's hand. "Madame, when you tire of this possessive creature, when your soul seeks serenity—I shall be at your side." His glare softened to gayety. "Larry, you lucky dog, from my heart I congratulate you."

This was their first dance together. On shipboard, when he had suggested it, Joyce had pleaded the mo-

tion of the ship. But now she was in his arms, and he was conscious of her as he had not been even this morning when he had strained her to him.

Exquisite, Jeanne Mazell had called her. But the word was not enough. The word connoted fragility, lack of fire . . . and this creature was alive, vital, superb. . . . He relinquished her at last.

"You dance well," she said.

It was her first speech since he had taken her from the Marquis.

"You—you—you're unbelievable," he muttered.

Her eyes grew chill. "Please—not this morning—again," she said.

She read his thoughts before he was aware of them himself. He flushed. The reaction from exaltation was too much for him. He was angered.

"Not again—not ever," he said harshly.

She smiled serenely. "Then we shall get on divinely."

Brunet, an Argentinian of French paternity, sleek, too well groomed, bowed before them. She floated away in his arms, and Tracy went sulkily to the bar, to solace himself with another cocktail. Valdemagara had found a trumpet somewhere and was summoning his guests to dinner. Tracy swept in with the others, and found himself a dozen places away from Joyce, seated between Jeanne Mazell and a vivacious Swiss, whose sturdy Teutonic countenance belied her irrepressible gayety.

But, thank God, Larry breathed, she had a devoted cavalier on her other side, and he did not need to play up to her. As for Jeanne Mazell, she wickedly ignored him, turning a very lovely and very white

shoulder to him most of the time. And when she did relent and address a few words to him, she did so in a scolding manner.

It was all play and all delightful—on any other occasion. But to-night, furtively watching attractive men bid for the favor of his wife's attention, watching Billy's exaggerated—yet sincere—admiration, Tracy felt tired, old, out of it all. Damn it all, why couldn't everything be forgotten? Why couldn't Joyce and himself pretend to each other that their marriage had been the normal result of normal acquaintance and growth of affection? . . .

But when he complimented her, told her that she was incredibly delightful, she shrank from him. He knew what she shrunk from. She was of that proud type that wants no passion unbased on love. Or was he not placing her on too high a pedestal? God, considering what he surmised, guessed—no, what he *knew*—what a fool he was to attribute to her motives whose delicacy made them ridiculous when applied to her!

Then he hated himself for thinking evil of this lovely thing. Then he despised himself for permitting a lovely face and a beautiful body to blind him to patent insincerities—and worse. Well, he was a fool. And *what* a fool!

The music struck up again and the diners left the table. Confetti flew between the tables; feather darts were tossed; the usual banalities of a *gala* were in full swing. To-night Larry would have enjoyed these manufactured efforts on the part of the management of a popular restaurant to make it still more pop-

ular, had Joyce glanced toward him, signaled him to come to her side.

But she didn't, and—well, he wouldn't intrude. Someone claimed Jeanne and someone else claimed the gay Swiss, so he was alone, partnerless. He slipped away from the table and stood on the rocks overlooking the shining sea.

He had no thoughts, was empty minded, save for a vague resentment at the world itself. And it was in this mood that Helen Wilson came upon him.

He became vaguely aware that someone else had come out upon the cliff, but didn't turn his head. Perhaps some couple, seeking privacy for the exchange of tender sentiments, had slipped away from the *gala*. Well, let them slip somewhere else. He had no concern for the loves of others, he who was having difficulties himself.

Then, as the approaching movement ceased, he had that consciousness of being stared at which is inexplicable save on the ground of inherited suspicious instinct. He turned, turned as though forced by the exercise of a will stronger—at the moment at least—than his own.

The moonlight fell full upon the face of the person whose stare had turned him around. It fell gently upon blonde curls, upon a sweetly seductive mouth, parted in tender eagerness now, upon blue eyes whose shallowness was concealed by the play of the moon, exactly as moonlight makes the shallowest pool seem of oceanic depth.

The parted lips spoke.

"Larry," they whispered.

"Helen," he said in amazement.

She moved a step toward him. Now he saw that her bosom rose and fell, could even hear the breath as it came from between her lips, could see and sense the agitation that possessed her. He didn't know how or why she was here, she who should have been back in New York with Frank Burton. He only knew that all her old charm was revived. He took a step toward her.

## CHAPTER XIV

**I**T WAS more than her old charm that was revived. Or, if not more, it was something different, this effect that her nearness, her surrendering forward step created within him.

She had been upon a pedestal, that pedestal upon which romantic mankind places realistic womankind, and from which woman too readily steps. For man is the romanticist. To him love is not a business, a career, a race preserving urge. Rather, it is the culmination of youthful dreams, it is an end in itself, not a stepping-stone to something else. Home, children, family ties—these may be vaguely encompassed in the thoughts of a man when he falls in love, but they are mere incidents in the great bewilderment that is masculine love.

Larry, adoring Helen Wilson, had not thought of her as the mistress of his home, as the mother of his children, nor as anything but an almost disembodied spirit. Of course, he knew that she had beauty of face and grace of figure, but he was aware of these only vaguely. That these were the attributes that had first attracted him to her he knew; he had never been insensible to a pretty face or form; but he would have indignantly denied that part of his anguish at her faithlessness had been due to the knowledge that he would never kiss those lips again, would never

hold that graceful body in warm embrace. She was the fulfillment of a dream, that was all.

But now, for the first time, this was no dream woman who stood so near that he could hear her gentle breathing. This was a woman of flesh and blood, a woman of vitality unsuspected heretofore by him. He was not enough of a self-analyst to know that Helen had become clothes with flesh simply because another woman had awakened desire in him. He thought that this was love, a reawakened love, that made his hands reach gropingly for the girl before him.

She stepped back, in a simulation of alarm that was convincing.

"Larry," she reproached him.

He dropped his hands beside him. "Why did you come?" he asked tonelessly.

"Why did you do—what you did?" she demanded.

"Marry? Why shouldn't I?" He glared angrily at her. "I told you I would. What difference did that make? To you, I mean. What do you care?"

"Why shouldn't I care?" she countered.

He was in better command of himself now.

"You exchanged five millions for fifty," he jeered. "Wasn't the trade a good one?"

She half turned. "If that is what you have to say——"

"What did you expect to hear?" he asked.

Her lips pouted faintly, as though she were about to weep. It was an old trick of hers, but he had never known it was a trick. In those lovers' quarrels in which they had occasionally indulged, she had al-

ways come out quick victor by this pretense at incipient tears.

"W-e-l-l, we had been friends—hadn't we, Larry?"

Even to him, beset by emotions really incomprehensible to him, this did not ring true.

"Friends? God Almighty, Helen, we were lovers. At least I loved you. And we were engaged to be married. *Friends!*"

"I loved you, too," she said.

"But how much?" he sneered.

"That isn't fair," she told him.

"Fair? What do you know about fairness? Was it fair to throw me over for an old man——"

"You aren't a girl, Larry. You aren't a girl with a mother who——" She paused.

"With a mother who what?" he insisted.

"Who loves me," she finished.

Even he, none too acute at the moment, disdained this.

"Loves you? What do you mean—loves you?"

"Mothers are ambitious," she explained.

"Well—she couldn't *make* you marry Burton," he accused.

"That's what I've found out," she said.

And now, instead of stepping away, she swayed toward him.

"What do you mean by that?" he asked. The hoarseness of his voice surprised him. It was as though someone else were speaking, and as though he were looking on, listening.

"Do I need to make it clearer?" she retorted.

"Are you telling me that you have decided not to marry him?" he asked.

"I don't know what I'm telling you—except that I—can't stand it if you—are cross with me."

Some day he would analyze these words of hers, would reduce them to their ultimate absurdity. But not now. She was young, she was beautiful. Another woman, equally as young and infinitely more beautiful, had denied him herself, had made it clear that she would always deny herself to him. But here was a woman, with whom he had been genuinely in love, in love with the spirit and not merely with the senses, who was intimating promise to him.

"Cross with you? I could never be angry," he heard himself saying.

"But look at what you did," she reproached him.

"Look at what you did," he rejoined with equal childishness.

"But I didn't—I only said I would," she retorted.

"You mean—look here, Helen, are you going to marry Burton or not?"

"What difference can that make to you? You're married, aren't you?"

"Where is Burton?" he asked.

She gestured indefinitely with her right hand.

"You mean that he's here—in France—at this restaurant?" He was incredulous.

"He brought Mother and myself here," she replied.

"Did you know that I was here?" he inquired.

"The papers told enough about your sailing," she said bitterly. "With your new bride, and——"

"I mean—did you know that I was in Biarritz?" he persisted.

"Why not? We read the Paris *Herald* like everyone else."

"But Burton—does he know I'm here?"

"Why not?" She was amazingly cool for one so emotional a moment ago.

"And your mother?"

"Mother knows you're here," she admitted.

He stared at her. She had flushed slightly, was less the doll than she had ever been in his acquaintance with her.

"When did you sail?" he asked.

"On the very next boat after you did," she cried. "Did you think that I could stay in New York—know that everyone was deriding——"

The very triumph for which he had craved; he knew now that he had achieved it. But what a pitiful, worthless, cheap thing it was! How could he ever, in no matter how mad a moment, have imagined that he would gain any satisfaction from such a bizarre revenge?

It never occurred to him to ask why, if she had fled derision, she had come to the very spot where, if it existed at all, it must be more pronounced even than in New York, to this resort where mutual friends, knowing of their broken romance, must wonder, tongue in cheek. . . .

It never occurred to him to ask any questions, for he was beyond all questioning. For with her last word she had swayed even nearer, and he only knew that she was in his arms.

Twelve hours ago he had held his wife in his arms, and the passivity of her surrender had chilled and shamed him. But this girl, this girl whom he had

loved, whom he had been pledged to marry, was returning his kiss.

He released her at length. Flushed, prettier in her shamed embarrassment than ever she had been as a cool, doll-like thing, she faced him.

"Well, what damned fools we've been, Helen," he said.

"You're mean," she bridled, "because—that's not a pretty way to thank me for a kiss."

"But why should we kiss furtively?" he cried. "You and I—oh, Helen, what a mess you made of things."

"Are you blaming me?"

He wrinkled his forehead quizzically. "Well, *I* didn't break our engagement. But let's not blame anyone—me, you, your mother—anyone. A mistake has been made—that's all. Now we must rectify it."

"Suppose," she suggested, "that your wife doesn't want to rectify it?"

He laughed harshly. "She'll be glad to be rid of me, Helen."

"And you? What about you?" she shrewdly asked.

"What do you mean?"

"Will you be glad—to get rid of her?"

"You're the woman I love, have always loved, Helen," he replied.

"Marrying another woman is a strange way of proving love," she charged.

"Breaking an engagement was an equally strange thing to do, if you really cared," he countered. "But, good Lord, my dear—let's not recriminate now. Let's say that we both did something we're not proud of and do our best to remedy the mistake."

"Mistake? Mistakes are easily remedied—sometimes. But a marriage——"

"There's always divorce," he suggested.

"And your wife?"

"I tell you," he said coldly, "that she'll be glad to let me go."

"Who was she? I'd never heard of her," said Helen.

He shook his head. "That doesn't matter. The point is that you and I—oh, Helen."

He took her in his arms again, and when he released her, it was because, through the misty haze that enveloped them, he became conscious of an alien presence.

He looked straight into the eyes of Paul Weedon.

"Sorry if I disturbed you, Larry," said Weedon.

Rumors that had come vaguely to Larry's knowledge, rumors of queer financial carryings-on, that hinted at shady indecencies barely within the law, came back to Tracy now as he stared at Weedon.

"Your wife," said the intruder, "sent me to look for you, and—I'll go back to her now—if you wish."

In his last three words he put all kinds of meaning, but Tracy, unaccustomed to dealing with Weedon's sort, was able only to read one kind. Weedon was threatening him.

"If I wish? Now just what do you mean by that, Weedon?" he demanded.

Weedon shrugged his too-heavy shoulders.

"Let's talk it over some other time, Tracy," he suggested.

Tracy moved toward him. "Let's talk it over now," he said.

Weedon lifted a fat palm.

"Now, don't make a scene, Larry," he advised.  
"Burton is here, and your wife is here——"

"And what have they to do with your being here,  
Weedon?" cried Larry.

"Nothing whatsoever. Nothing at all," replied  
the other. "Only—you'll admit the circumstances are  
peculiar."

"Why should I admit that—to you?" said Larry.

"Well, it doesn't matter whether or not *you* admit  
it," sneered Weedon. "They *are* peculiar. Less than  
a month ago you and Miss Wilson were engaged.  
Now she's engaged to another man; you're married  
to another woman—and I find you here. Kissing."

"You know, of course," said Larry quietly, "that  
if another man had found us here—he'd have stolen  
away—kept his mouth shut——"

"The intimation being that I'm not a gentleman,  
eh?"

"The intimation being all of that and anything  
else you like," snapped Larry.

"And suppose I don't like your intimations?" sug-  
gested Weedon.

"Then," and Larry's teeth shone in the moonlight,  
"it's always my hardest effort to please. If a client  
doesn't like what I offer, I think of something else.  
Such as this."

His hands went suddenly out. They clasped about  
Weedon's throat.

"Now, you fat rat," he snarled, "how do you like  
this *intimation?*"

"Larry! Please!" Helen's voice cut staccato  
through the heavy strangled breathing of Weedon.

Instantly Tracy released the man. Weedon adjusted his black tie.

"I might have been reasonable, Tracy," he snarled. "But now——"

"Now, you'll probably make up your mind that there's no possible blackmail to be obtained, so—you'll be nasty," said Larry.

He turned to Helen.

"My dear," he said, "I'm very sorry. I—you know how I've always felt about you. But I should have remembered that you—don't feel that way about me. I apologize for having offended you."

"*Offended her?*" Weedon's laugh was nasty. "Clever try, Tracy. Only—I stood, looking at you, for five minutes. The lady didn't fight very hard."

"May I take you back to the restaurant, Helen?" Tracy offered her his arm. He turned back to Weedon. "Weedon, each time I see you, from now on, I'm going to thrash you. Believe that as you believe in your god, Weedon."

"You can't," whispered Helen, as they moved back toward the dancing place.

Tracy laughed bitterly. "I must," he responded. "Well, what are we to do, Helen?"

"Do?" The girl shrugged hopelessly. "I don't know—if he talks——"

Valdemagara hailed them as they came within the radiance of the lights.

"Larry, your wife wants you. Why, Heaven only knows. With me here——"

"May I present the Marquis de Valdemagara?"

Larry, with a quick apology, made the two known to each other, and crossed the dancing floor to where

his wife, dividing all—practically—of eligible or desirable male Biarritz with Jeanne Mazell, sat his wife. She looked up gratefully as he approached. Somehow—Larry couldn't understand how she came to have the air of a grande dame—she dissipated her suitors with a gesture.

"I just wanted to tell you, Larry," she said, "what everyone else knows. Helen Wilson and Frank Burton are here."

He looked at her. "I've seen Helen," he said. "I've been outside on the rocks, talking with her."

Her eyebrows drew faintly nearer to each other.

"You've seen her?" she asked.

"Paul Weedon came upon us as we were kissing," he said. "I thought I'd better be the first to tell you."

"Kissing—why, that means—"

And then, definitely, for always he knew.

"No," he almost cried, "it means—it means, Joyce, that I love you."

## CHAPTER XV

**H**E WONDERED, in a stupid sort of fashion, if all his realizations would forever be after-thoughts. To-day he had fought against loving his wife. This evening he had renounced her, been unfaithful to her in the spirit if only technically so in the flesh. He had renewed an old allegiance, finding its bonds suddenly sweeter than ever they had been in the past. But now he realized that he had utterly misread himself, had not understood at all the emotions that had swept over him.

He had thought this morning—and again to-night when he danced with Joyce—that her appeal to him was a thing attributable to her grace and beauty. He had thought, five minutes ago, that it was Helen's spirit that had drawn him to her, although he had recognized that Helen, too, was lovely.

But now, looking down into the questioning eyes of his wife, he knew, forever, that were she clothed in the drear dry flesh of age, he would love her. He knew that for weal or woe, through all this lifetime and—pray God—through æons of immortality, he would adore her.

Why? God knew! Why hadn't he known before? God also knew the answer to that. It was as though he had come through some molding process, until now, at length, he was set everlasting in the spiritual shape which always he would retain.

Beyond her beauty he looked at her soul. It was not, Heaven help him, what he would have liked to see. It was clouded, soiled, by the words of Rogan, by the afternoon's incident in the *chemin de fer* room. But that didn't matter. That soul called to him, possessed him, and would always possess him.

He had not "lived" as other men of his acquaintance had lived. There had been plenty of temptation through which he had not come entirely unscathed, but his relations with women, his attitude toward them were clean. Reverence had never departed from him. But now he wished that he had lived as the companions of his college days had lived. Experience teaches, and it might have been possible for him to have learned by experience something—not about women—about himself. Unless one has experienced certain emotions, certain reactions, it is difficult to understand just what they amount to, what real meaning they possess.

Now everything was clear. But why couldn't everything have been clear weeks ago? Why should clarity of thought have waited until he had been untrue to himself, and done hurt to others?

He had never loved Helen. That he knew now. He had given her a naïve, schoolboyish sort of love, filled with idealization and without the solid basis of realistic understanding of what she was. But to Joyce he had given real love, a love that was based upon understanding, a love that recognized her unworthiness and thus was more binding.

And he had hurt Joyce. That question in her eyes could only have been inspired by hurt. And it didn't matter that in hurting her he had hurt himself in-

finitely more. He faced a future filled with self-hurt. Everything about Joyce would hurt him; the piling-up knowledge of her past, until suspicion became definite fact—but it didn't matter. He loved her, and no matter how this love might hurt and shame him, he must be true to it and to himself.

Now the question faded from her eyes. Its place was taken by a cool cynicism.

"Then," she said, "the way for me to prove my love for you—if I should ever feel any—would be to kiss another man?"

"Joyce," he pleaded, "you don't understand."

"I'm afraid I don't," she scoffed. "I'm afraid that any woman would find you hard to comprehend."

"A generous woman might not find it difficult," he said.

"What has generosity to do with you and me?" she harshly demanded. "We made a bargain. I could serve you, and you could be of use to me. And there was an understanding—you were to ask nothing of me, and if I didn't state it in so many words, nevertheless you knew that I would never ask anything of you."

"I knew that," he said.

"Then why tell me that you have kissed another woman? I suppose," she thrust, "that you even discussed the possibility of erasing the blot upon your happiness which happens to be myself?"

He colored. "Joyce, what does it matter what he said? If I love you——"

"What has that to do with the case?" she interrupted. "You say that Weedon saw you. You say that you wanted to be the first to tell me. I love

your well-bred friends who, you think, would be apt to inform me——”

“Weedon would,” he said.

“Did he say he would?” she asked. “And is that why you thought you’d reach me first?”

“I would have told you anyway,” he said.

“And you let Weedon frighten you?” she inquired.

“I’ve told Weedon I’d thrash him every time I saw him,” he blazed.

“That’s better,” she said surprisingly.

“I don’t understand,” he said.

“It doesn’t matter,” she replied. “Nothing that you do matters. And perhaps Miss Wilson is waiting for you.”

“Joyce, that’s unworthy of you,” he pleaded.

“How do you know what’s worthy or unworthy of me?” she cried. “What do you know about me, anyway?”

“Enough,” he said gently, “to know that you aren’t behaving very well now.”

“And you feel that you—just from the moonlight with—just from the arms of another woman—you feel that you can tell me anything of decent behavior?”

“Joyce, you said that we had an agreement? Suppose I wanted to kiss her again—would I be violating any pledge to you?”

“You’d be violating something more important than a pledge—you’d be violating every known decency if, in the very moment you kissed her, you came to me speaking of love for me.”

“But don’t you see,” he argued. “I didn’t know I cared until——”

“I don’t think,” she interrupted, “that I care to

have your love for me weighed in the scales of another woman's arms. I think—oh, why do you make me talk? You're hateful, hateful. And—it's vulgar—for people to quarrel. But it's more vulgar for you—to go to another woman, tell of divorcing me——”

“Joyce,” he begged, “would you mind if we didn't talk about it? I've been the most incredible fool that ever lived. I'm everything you want to think me. But I'm also, my child, the man that happens to love you, and—it hurts, Joyce.”

“Do you think it doesn't hurt me? You say that Mr. Weedon saw you. Do you think it's pleasant to have all Biarritz know that my husband, the man I married a month ago, is already having an affair with the girl he was once engaged to marry?”

“Weedon won't talk,” he said.

“No? How little you know of people, Larry. Did you strike him?”

He nodded assent.

“Then of course he'll talk. Oh, I know. He's a coward and all that. But he must have some respect for himself, and the only way he can have it is by pretending to himself that he's not afraid of you.”

He thrust shrewdly. “It seems that you're more worried about people knowing what I did than by the fact that I did it.”

Her eyes were glacial now.

“What you did or may do can have no possible effect upon me by itself. But what other people know—I don't care for pity. And when you insult me by telling me that another woman's kiss has made you love me——”

"If my love is an insult," he began.

She interrupted him impatiently.

"Let's be anything, but not melodramatic," she said.

She started to go on but he didn't catch her words, so quickly did she smother them. Following her glance, he turned around. Helen Wilson, her mother, and Frank Burton stood behind him.

"We want to be presented to the bride," said Mrs. Wilson.

Stiffly Larry performed the introductions.

"Larry ran away so quickly—never told his friends—"

Whatever thrust lay back of Mrs. Wilson's opening sentence was parried before it was delivered.

"It was my fault," said Joyce easily. "I could have made Larry stay in New York, but—Larry's a very exacting husband. He wants one, so to speak, all to himself."

It was vulgar. Larry conceded that. But so was Mrs. Genevieve Wilson. She knew that her daughter had been engaged to Larry. To intimate, in her opening speech to Joyce, that Joyce's husband had run away, was to intimate that he ran because he had done something shameful. Well-bred people don't do that sort of thing. And vulgarity can only be met by vulgarity. Courtesy upon a boor is wasted, is misinterpreted as a sign of weakness. And there was, Larry knew, nothing of weakness in the woman he had married.

"I've been talking with Larry," said Helen.

Joyce laughed. There was a genuine merriment in her voice, and Larry, who knew that she was far from gay deep down inside her, marveled at her acting.

"He told me," she replied. "About that ridiculous Mr. Weedon also."

"What was that? What did Weedon do?" Burton spoke for the first time.

Joyce looked blandly at Helen, waiting for the other girl to speak. In this warfare between them, Larry realized, Joyce had somehow, incomprehensibly drawn first blood. For Helen blushed painfully.

"Oh, nothing, Frank. He is ridiculous, you know."

"Looks like a rat to me," said Burton.

Joyce eyed this man of more than middle age. He had remnants of a sort of good looks, and she recognized the pains he had taken to preserve these remnants. Here was no man who indulged in outdoor sports for the pleasure games gave him. Rather, this was a man who worked so many dull minutes each morning, so many more boring minutes each night, for the preservation of his waistline. She could visualize the *masseurs* who came to him, knew instinctively that his barber was as important a functionary with him as the hairdresser is to the normal woman.

In the average person who seizes upon the shadow of youth and tries to convert it to substance, there is something pathetic, sometimes even something admirable. But not in Frank Burton. The man was mean, essentially and completely mean, and Joyce felt instant antagonism toward him. He was, she felt, of Weedon's type, only he had a strength that Weedon lacked, a ruthlessness of purpose that had made him, instead of a petty blackmailer, a master of finance.

He gave her back glance for glance. She felt that he was appraising her as coolly as she was valuing him.

"Will you dance with me, Mrs. Tracy?" he asked. Joyce rose. "I should love to," she replied.

She hid a smile at the chagrin on her husband's face as she glided away with Burton. It was a situation worthy of a French farce. The bride of the jilted fiancé was dancing with the new fiancé.

"Thank you," murmured Burton.

She looked up at him. His purposeful eyes told her that he was paying no commonplace tribute to her condescension in dancing with him. Too many young and beautiful women had danced with Burton, she sensed, for him to feel flattery because another one slipped willingly into his arms. The man who could win Helen Wilson, even though money was the heavy artillery in the victory, would hold no light estimate of himself. She inconsequently wondered that he danced so well.

"Why?" she asked.

"I always feel grateful to anyone who doesn't avoid an issue."

"But why to me?" she inquired.

She felt the arm about her move in response to a shrug of the heavy shoulder.

"Why fence?" he retorted.

"Fence?" She felt color in her cheeks.

"A woman who could do what you've done doesn't have to parry when she's dealing with a man who could do what I've done," he said.

"I suppose," she tried to laugh, "that's very clear, only I—I'm afraid I don't understand."

"Words don't matter. If you understand me that's enough," he told her.

"And how could I understand you?" she queried.

"Just as easily as I can understand you," he replied.  
"More easily. Because I had to make inquiries about  
you—had to reply on written reports——"

"Written reports?" She tried to keep dismayed  
anger from her voice, but felt a sickening certainty  
that she could not deceive this man.

"Naturally, I didn't want the private detectives I  
engaged to know that they were working for me," he  
calmly answered. "So—the reports were written, not  
verbal. But you—your husband has perhaps men-  
tioned me. And a man of my age, who proposes mar-  
riage to a very young woman—well, a girl like your-  
self would think such a man easily read."

She ignored the latter part of his speech.

"Why did you have detectives," she almost choked  
over the words, "trace me?"

"Why do I have reports on everyone with whom  
I do business?" he countered.

"I'm sure I don't know." She tried to be glacial,  
and once again felt that her effort was unperceived  
by him, or, at least, that the result of effort was  
unimportant to him.

"Because knowing the other fellow's strength—or  
weakness—may vitally affect my own attitude," he  
told her.

"And you have discovered my—weakness?" she  
ventured.

"Perhaps your strength," he said.

"Because you anticipate doing—business—with  
me" she asked.

"Such a thing is possible, isn't it?" he demanded.

"I can't imagine why," she replied.

"Then imagine, if you can, why I am in Biarritz," he suggested.

"Why shouldn't you be in Biarritz?" she asked.

"Do I seem the sort of man to be led around by the nose?"

"Are you being led—that way?" She was avoiding his eyes now.

"I happen to want something very badly, Mrs. Tracy," he said. "That something happens to be the girl to whom your husband was so recently engaged. It doesn't matter that it is, perhaps, rather silly for fifty to want twenty. I want her. That's enough for me, Mrs. Tracy. And I trust that it will be enough for you."

"I think," said Joyce, "it's about time for some sort of explanation."

"But the explanation is obvious. You're too clever not to have guessed it, Mrs. Tracy."

"But I haven't," she assured him.

"Well, I'll try to put it in words of one syllable," he said. "My fiancée demanded that we come here. She knew that your husband was here. She may have regretted her dismissal of your husband. Now do you understand? If you don't, I'll make it still clearer. You married for money, Mrs. Tracy. A girl doesn't marry, for love, a man she doesn't know. Mrs. Tracy, you want your husband to keep his money, don't you?"

"Well?" she said, as he paused.

"Then keep your husband," he snapped.

Now she sought and held his eyes. She stifled an impulse to laugh. The bride of a month was being *ordered* to hold her husband's affection. But she didn't laugh. The threat she read in Burton's eyes

drove mirth from her mind. What was he intimating about Larry's money? But he was answering the question for her.

"Lose your husband, Mrs. Tracy, and I promise you that he loses every cent he has in the world."

## CHAPTER XVI

IDLY, she wondered what was the color of Burton's eyes. For as she looked at them they seemed to change from palest gray to deepest green. She had a queer feeling that all of the man was like this, that his features might seem to change under emotion, and that beneath his features his character would also change. This, of course, could not be true. Nevertheless, she was willing to believe that there could be such extraordinary diversity in the traits of Burton that one might be justified in imagining that two souls dwelt within the single body.

His eyes—his expression, too—had been pleasant enough until the very minute that he had said that Larry might lose every cent he owned in the world, and then the eyes had become frightening in their pale glare. Almost like madness. . . . But not that, really. Merely the inflexible will showing through. . . . It took will to amass fifty millions, and more will to keep it. She imagined someone trying to take Burton's money away from him. At the thought she smiled.

"Find it funny?" he asked.

"No," she soberly answered.

"Why the smile?" he persisted.

She told him the inconsequential thought that had drifted from nowhere, into her mind.

"Glad you got the angle," he commented. "You're

right. Nobody's getting my money. Nor anything else I happen to own—or want. Or, if anyone does, then I get something in return. Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"Do about it?" Now he was funny, and her smile was not speculative but was the product of genuine amusement. "Mr. Burton, aren't you being rather ridiculous?"

"If it's ridiculous to realize that I'm thirty years older than Helen, that she happens to be in love—as much as she can be in love—with your husband, and that he's probably still in love with her——"

"That isn't very complimentary to me," she interjected.

"You and I aren't passing compliments," he dryly rejoined. "This is business. I'm not saying that you couldn't make Tracy forget all about Helen. As a matter of fact, I think you can. The point is—you've got to."

"You win all your business battles this way?" she inquired.

"I win them any way I can," he replied. "But win them. Never forget that, Mrs. Tracy."

"And even unwilling brides——"

"You have too much sense to talk that way," he interrupted. "Helen's a young girl. She'll be twenty times as happy with me as with Tracy. Only—she doesn't realize that yet. I know her, I understand her—and as for her unwillingness—I'll take care of that after I'm married to her. Well, where do we stand?"

Now her smile was neither speculative nor derisive. It was wise, wiser than her years.

"Together, Mr. Burton."

He nodded. "I thought so." Admiration crept into his glance. "You're an unusual woman, Mrs. Tracy."

"You're not an ordinary man," she laughed.

He accepted the statement, compliment or flattery, quietly.

"I guess I'm not," he admitted. "Ordinary men don't do what I've managed to do."

"I wasn't thinking of your money," she said.

"I know. You mean—my coming out frankly—well, a man can have the wrong kind of vanity, you know. I haven't got that kind. I know that when a young girl accepts me, she isn't lying awake nights thinking of my eyes."

"Then why not," Joyce ventured, "look for a woman who—"

"We do what we have to when it comes to love," he answered. "We never love the kind we want to love."

They circled the room in silence.

"I said a minute ago," he finally broke the pause, "that I didn't have a certain kind of vanity. But I have another kind. I don't want—I'm not going to be made ridiculous, Mrs. Tracy. I want Helen to understand—right away—that Larry Tracy belongs to you."

"Don't ask too much too quickly, Mr. Burton," she advised. "And—I think we've said enough, don't you."

He looked down at her face. "Well, I guess we have," he said.

His features relaxed, and that inner meanness of

which she had been conscious from the moment of meeting him, became, in his complacency, an almost outwardly visible thing. She had experiences, this girl, with many kinds of men, but Burton was beyond anything she had thus far encountered.

Victory. That was all that counted with Burton. That the victory was petty, unworthy, unfairly gained —these things could not matter to Burton. She could imagine him, if need seemed to arise, cheating at cards, and accepting his winnings with the same complacency that was in his expression now. He had gained Helen Wilson's promise to marry him by the force of his fortune. He now believed that she would fulfill that promise because of a threat that he made to Joyce. And probably, married to Helen, he would parade her with pride, as though his own innate charm had won beauty to his side.

A mental nausea suddenly attacked her. Here were people who saw the best, ate the best, drank the best, lived the best, had the best, and ought, by reason of their opportunities, to think the best and be the best. They might not be of the world's aristocracy, but they were of the world's smart, and aristocracy no longer held itself aloof, but tried to join the smart.

In Burton's lapel was a little silk-covered button. France had deemed something he had done worthy of honor. It didn't matter that the Legion was nowadays granted almost as freely as concessions at Coney Island—after all, it was the Legion. This man Burton had the entrée, she knew, to the sanctums of the great. If he went to London, the American Ambassador would make appointments for him with England's highest. The White House doors were never

barred against him. Newspapers took pains to chronicle his lightest word, his casual comings and goings. Matrons—witness Mrs. Wilson—were glad to give him opportunity with their daughters.

She wondered if ever there had been a time when brains and character had really amounted to more in the world of affairs than cunning and meanness. Probably not. Probably history lied about the past as current reporting lied about the present. There's probably never been a time when meanness was not in the ascendancy, because meanness will work for petty ends and character will not.

Burton was not the only person here who inspired contempt. Helen Wilson's mother had snobbery and greed written plainly on her face. Jeanne Mazell was nice, and so were one or two other of these people gathered here, notably Billy Valdemagara. But even he, aristocrat by birth and a gentleman by happy accident, seemed to chum around with swine. How could a man like Paul Weedon be accepted, for even a single second, unless those who accepted him had traits or character so like his that contempt did not occur to them?

She despised herself that she did not release herself from Burton's arms instantly. Had there been only herself to consider, she might have done so. But the man had threatened Larry's fortune, and she did not believe that he uttered threats lightly.

She frowned faintly. How could it be possible for Burton to ruin Larry? But she knew that there were intricacies of finance incomprehensible to her. Somehow she believed that Burton could do what he said he'd do. And once again, the utter absurdity of the

whole situation swept over her, so that she was smiling when Billy Valdemagara thrust his red head through the press of dancers and cut in.

"I am disappointed in you, Mrs. Tracy," said the Spaniard.

"In me? I'm afraid that you're a fickle man, Billy," she laughed. "A while ago I flattered myself that I had won a heart, but now——"

His freckled face wrinkled in a grin at her obviously sham pathos.

"That was before I found you smiling at the dull Burton," he explained. "Behind me, languishing on the outskirts of the dance floor, waiting a reasonable time before cutting in upon that odious man, saying to myself, 'No, it is not right that you should place so much charm before Mrs. Tracy,' reminding myself, again and again, that Larry is my friend.

"And then, finally, I approach you, and Burton has made you smile. It is a shock, Mrs. Tracy, a distinct shock. Had any of these other women been pleased with him, I would have dismissed it from my thoughts. They are obvious creatures who cannot understand the obvious. But you—I thought better of you."

"Some day I'll explain the smile," she said. "Just now, suppose we let it be understood that I felt your yearning and my lips merely expressed the anticipation in my heart."

The Marquis beamed upon her. As outward expression of his inner feelings, he whirled her amazingly around, and Larry Tracy, looking on, marveled once again at the exquisite grace of the woman he had married. For Valdemagara danced with a rhythm unknown to many professionals. Yet Joyce followed

his every step with utter ease and with an abandon that only superb ability could save from awkwardness.

Mrs. Wilson had left to dance with someone and he and Helen were alone.

"Larry," said the girl, "I'm afraid."

"Of whom?" he asked.

"Of your—wife," she replied. She rushed into words. "Larry—she—she looked at me as though she knew—what happened out there." She glanced toward the cliff. "How could she?"

"I told her," he answered.

"*Told her?*" She was unbelieving. "Why, Larry—what can she think—of me?"

"I've been wondering," he bitterly replied, "what she's thinking of me."

"Is she—will she—divorce you?"

He shook his head. "I'll never let her do that."

"*You'll* not let *her!* Larry, what do you mean?"

"I mean," he said, "that I love her."

She stared at him. The shallow blue eyes took on opacity that made them hard to fathom.

"Then—what happened—out there—didn't mean—what we thought it meant?"

"How could it?" he asked. "Helen, you don't love me. If you did, our engagement would never have been broken. Your mother could never have made you do that. Not if you'd cared."

"Perhaps," she said, "you'd never have let me, if you'd really cared."

He stared at her. "That may be true," he admitted. "But—that's all ended now. What—just happened—I know you didn't mean it. The impulse——"

"Are you being chivalrous, Larry?" Her voice was mocking.

He shook his head. "I'm just trying to be truthful."

"Sometimes women prefer falsehoods," she reminded him.

"There's been enough of that between us," he retorted.

"You mean—on my side?"

He leaned forward and touched the hand that lay idly on the table edge.

"Helen, let's be friends."

"Why?" she asked.

"Well, why not?" he inquired.

"Do you think we can be?"

"We can try," he told her.

"Have you ever heard of the woman scorned?"

Her voice was light.

"If I thought you meant that, I'd feel badly," he rejoined. "But a moment—after what we'd been to each other——"

"Of course I don't mean it. And—you're right," she said. "The moon, the surf, the sight of each other—only—you had no right to tell your wife, Larry. What on earth does she think of me?"

He made no reply to this, for Mainwaring, one of the nondescript, but well-mannered members of the colony, bowed before her and begged for a dance.

Larry reached for a drink. He needed one, had earned one, he felt. In the short space of thirty minutes, he had been spiritually unfaithful to his wife, had discovered that he loved her, had broken the chains—forever—of a previous love affair, had told

his wife what he had done—oh, it was too mixed up. He drank deeply of the champagne and refilled his glass.

He was lifting it to his lips when Jeanne Mazell's bright voice rebuked him.

"Larry Tracy, put that down," she ordered.

"Why?" he mildly inquired.

"Because you're one American abroad who isn't going to drink too much," she told him.

"Seen signs of my approaching surrender to the demon?" he laughed.

She nodded. "A very beautiful sign."

"And that cryptic remark, is, I suppose, perfectly clear?"

"Don't be silly, Larry. Everyone here knows about you and Helen Wilson. But they needn't know that seeing her has upset you."

"Will a second glass of champagne inform them of that?" he jeered.

"Too many second glasses will," she replied. "I should think," she went on, "that ordinary good taste would have kept her away."

"Thinking aloud is sometimes rude, Jeanne," he warned her.

"And there are worse things, my silly friend, than rudeness," she retorted. "Larry, do you realize how lovely Joyce is?"

"I'm beginning to," he said.

"Other men don't need as long as you seem to," she said. "Billy Valdemagara has gone in at the deep end already."

"Billy always does, doesn't he?" he commented.

She shook her head.

"Not this way, Larry."

"Well, you should know. He's been your pet particular private beau for—how long, Jeanne?"

"Not ever," she answered. "Billy hasn't ever been any woman's tame cat. Billy likes me, and I like Billy. I'm only fonder of two men, my husband and you, Larry."

"That's sweet of you, Jeanne," he told her.

"I'm not being sweet. I'm being honest. I like you, Larry. And I've fallen in love with your wife. Larry, no man can be blamed for being a fool once, but a second time . . ." She shook her head.

"What was the first?" he asked.

"Kissing Helen Wilson where Weedon could see you," she answered.

His eyebrows raised. "So Paul has talked already, eh?"

"And will talk more. You struck him, Larry. He *had* to talk."

He studied her. "You girls all think alike—and correctly, don't you?"

"What does that mean?" she asked.

"Joyce warned me, too," he replied.

## CHAPTER XVII

LARRY, you incredible child, do you mean that you *told* Joyce, yourself——”

“Why not? She’d have heard it rather soon, I think. Don’t you?”

She ignored the question.

“You didn’t tell her because you were afraid someone else would, Larry. Oh, Larry Tracy, don’t you know that the time to tell a woman you love is *not* when you’ve discovered it?”

“You’re not by any chance, given to this sort of thing, are you? It must be rather disconcerting to your intimates, Jeanne.”

“Oh, I’ve not been reading your mind, my child,” she laughed. “One doesn’t do that sort of thing, Larry. One reads one’s own, guesses that someone else has reacted in the same way—Larry, dear boy, I didn’t know I loved Jim until—well, there was someone else. Jim—bless him—lets me do as I please. Always has. And—Jim’s older and—understands. But I didn’t understand. And someone else—yes, there was a kiss, too, Larry, and I ran straight to Jim, and told him what I’d just found out, that I adored him and no one else. So you see?”

“Then you did exactly what I did.”

“But with a woman it’s different, Larry. But no man would understand. You should have waited—waited until Helen Wilson’s gone—what did Joyce

say? No, I didn't mean to ask that. It's none of my business. In fact, none of this is my business, but —you wife is *sweet*, Larry."

"I've discovered that," he said dryly.

"So have others, and so will more," she told him.

"You were, I believe, about to warn me about Billy—"

"Don't be silly. Billy's a gentleman. But breeding doesn't always protect a man from himself, you know. Larry, don't neglect—"

"Oh, my God, don't make me laugh, Jeanne," he interrupted. "If there's neglect, it will be hers. Not that she won't be right about it—"

"I wish," sighed Jeanne, "that there were no such thing as sex loyalty. But there is, and I'm a slave to it. With which cryptic remark the beautiful young matron indicated her desire to be asked to dance, and the gentleman—"

"Rose to the occasion, Mrs. Mazell, will you do me the great honor to aid me in knocking a few Argentinians off this here, now, dancing floor?"

As they glided out upon the floor, the Marquis and Joyce returned to the table. The two women smiled at each other, but Valdemagara's nod to Larry was none too cordial.

As they sat down Joyce noted a cut on the knuckles of Billy's right hand.

"You're bleeding," she said.

He nodded carelessly. "Hit it against something."

Joyce eyed him.

"Not since we started dancing? But of course not. When?"

He avoided her eyes. "Outside—on a rock?"

She shifted the subject suddenly.

"Why are you offended with Larry?"

His amazement was too great.

"Offended? With your husband? My dear Mrs. Tracy——"

"Why?" she flatly interrupted.

"I don't know what you are talking about," he protested. "Larry is one of my best friends——"

"Which always adds to the gravity of the offense," she said. "Why, Billy?"

"Aren't you being a bit serious without reason?" he asked.

"Perhaps you have been serious—without reason," she countered.

"Let's dance," he abruptly suggested.

"We've danced enough, Billy," she said gently. "So—Mr. Weedon has been talking already, eh?"

Valdemagara blushed deeply. "I don't know what you mean," he muttered.

"And you struck him. That was rather fine of you, Billy, even if it's the one thing that will make him talk the more. You see, Larry had already struck him, yet—he talked."

"Larry struck him?"

"Of course. Men are like that. They never realize that blows only have effect upon the brave, who are humiliated by them. The coward—and that's why you were cool to Larry. You expect too much of men, Billy, and being a man you should know that."

"I wasn't cool to Larry," he protested.

"Then you didn't believe Weedon?"

"What do you know about all this, anyway?" he asked.

"Only what Larry has already told me. You see, he kissed the lady. Weedon saw them, and—Larry came to me."

"The idiot," exclaimed Valdemagara.

"So another person—of my own sex—said. But I don't feel that way. I—after all, it was decent of him."

The Marquis' eyes met hers. "Then you've forgiven him? Joyce—you are my friend and I am your friend, and I shall always call you Joyce—you have forgiven him?"

"Ah, that is something else," she replied. "To respect a man for his honesty, does not mean that one forgives him for—other matters. Now—shall we dance again?"

But Jeanne Mazell, surrounded by her group of suitors, came to the table.

"We're going bathing," she announced.

"Where? You can't do that over here, Jeanne," said the Marquis. "This isn't America."

"Really?" Jeanne's gentle eyes hardened. "One might equally truly say that it isn't Spain, where, I understand, midnight bathing parties have been known to occur."

"I am properly abashed," said Billy. "But where?"

"Here—in the Casino, I mean, a hundred yards from here."

"It's closed," objected the Marquis.

"I've already arranged for it to be opened," restored Jeanne.

"Then there is no more to be said," said the Marquis with mock chagrin.

He turned to Joyce.

"Aren't you afraid of the water at night?"

"He's trying to make you agree to sit out on the sand with him, Joyce," said Jeanne. "Don't let him spoil my party."

"I thought," said Valdemagara, "this was *my* party."

"Oh," said Mrs. Mazell, "I'll let you *pay* for everything, Billy."

"Angel," breathed the Marquis.

He took Joyce's arm on the descent to the sea, and kept up idle chatter on matters having nothing to do with the subject they had just been discussing.

At the entrance to the Casino, Joyce parted from him with the feeling that he was distinctly even nicer than she had at first thought him. There was a certain chivalry in him not usually found, she thought, in men. Most men, on finding that an attractive woman—she termed herself such without conceit—had an unfaithful husband, would have been pleased at the discovery. Hardly anyone would have struck the man who brought the information. Valdemagara was different. And he hadn't struck Weedon—despite his failure to admit the occasion for his bruised hand she knew how it had been injured—because he was protecting the fair fame of Helen Wilson. Instinctively she knew this. Valdemagara had wanted to protect Larry's wife from hurt.

A nice man. This evening she reconstructed certain opinions of the rest of this cosmopolitan colony. They were not, on second glance, as attractive as at first they seemed. But Valdemagara was even more attractive. As she turned into the women's section of the Casino, herded along with the other women by Jeanne Mazell,

she wondered that the Marquis had never succumbed to feminine charms. Certainly, he'd never been conquered to the extent of matrimony.

He must be very nearly thirty. One couldn't have his easy way and be much under thirty. He was rich, she gathered. Certainly he was most attractive. Women must like him and find it easy to love him.

How easy would it be to love him?

She felt herself blushing as she asked this question. And another came uninvited into her mind. How easy would it be to make him love her?

She wondered how Larry Tracy would like the answer to this if she told it to him. For she knew the answer now. Billy Valdemagara might have resisted women for nearly thirty years, but he couldn't resist now for thirty days. Perhaps thirty hours would be enough to complete a conquest. The red-headed Spanish Marquis had reached the end of meaningless dalliance if she, Joyce Tracy, chose to have it that way.

Did she choose? As she undressed in the privacy of her bathing cabin, she wondered.

The sort of love that Larry Tracy offered—did she want it? Could she force herself to accept it? What did she owe Tracy? He had used her for a convenience. He had been chivalrous enough when she was starving, had shown a gentleness that was extraordinary. But after that? His conferring of his name meant nothing. He'd married her to satisfy a wickedly juvenile pique. What did she owe him? Nothing.

And to-night, because he had touched the lips of Helen Wilson, and found them not as sweet as retrospect had assured him they were, he had come to her,

whose lips were untouched by him, and proffered a thing which he called love.

Well, she didn't want it, wouldn't take it. . . .

The Casino officials, complaisant to the whims of rich sojourners, had illuminated the beach. As an adventure, this midnight swimming party left much to be desired. As a dip into wickedness it also left a great deal to the imagination.

Everyone was as properly clothed as in the day-time, and instead of two life-savers, there were four *gens d'armes* to enforce the rule against venturing too far out into the sea. Also, the water, never too warm, was chilly to-night.

Jeanne Mazell, always desirous of being extreme, was the first to admit that she had been wrong in her wish for thrill to-night, and cry enough. Ten minutes after the first toe had been timidly inserted in the sea, the last of the bathers was shivering in his room, pulling on clothes and crying loudly for cognac.

Back in the half-deserted Reserve, the party languished. The cold water had killed the inclination to dance.

"Jeanne, as a leader of the fast younger set, you seem pretty much of a bust to me," chaffed Larry.

Mrs. Mazell shook her blonde bobbed hair defiantly.

"I thought it would be fun—but I see it wasn't. Well, who's for home and bed?"

"I can look the idea in the face without qualms," said Larry.

"Me, too," said Valdemagara. "Jeanne, you have ruined an evening."

"Too bad," mocked the pretty blonde. "But it's past two o'clock and I need my beauty sleep."

She rose, and even had the temerity to stretch and yawn, which proved how justly conscious she was of her looks. Across the dance floor came Helen Wilson and her mother, accompanied by Burton. They had not been of the Valdemagara party, but it was apparent that they knew everyone, and they exchanged gay farewells with all.

Suddenly the very sight of Helen became unendurable to Joyce. Despite the farewells, the party seemed to take on a new lease of life. The orchestra had struck up a lively air, and Burton had given a signal whereat champagne appeared upon the tables.

Behind the table where she sat was a row of palms and Joyce slipped through them. She couldn't leave without Larry and she had not seen him since the brief adventure on the beach. But she didn't want to talk to Burton, queerly felt that if he uttered another hinted threat she'd scream, and she certainly didn't want to scream.

As for Helen—the girl was shameless. Joyce didn't condemn easily. She knew—better than most—what circumstances would do to people. But here was a girl who had deliberately thrown overboard the man she professed to love, and who was now cheating her fiancé while she endeavored to bring back to her side the jilted man.

Scruples? Where were they? These people, who prided themselves on being smart and fashionable and well-bred, thought no more of a marriage than they did of a social engagement. One could be broken as

easily as the other. The laws of *meum* and *tuum* had no reference to matrimony, apparently.

She couldn't face any of them until the soft night breeze blew upon her face, wafted away the angry thoughts within her brain. . . .

She stood on the top of the cliff, watching the white breakers gleaming far out on the bar, and hearing the nearer ones crash to bubbling foam on the rocks below her. She felt that queer sensation which height sometimes brings, the sensation of being about to fall, of falling, of leaping, and that desire which suddenly accompanies the sensation.

Was this Joyce Tracy, who felt an unaccountable wish to hurl herself from the cliff top? . . . She put out a hand, touched the trunk of a tree and steadied herself. She put a hand to her forehead and found it wet with perspiration.

"Here you are, eh? Been looking for you."

It was Larry's voice, and what animosity she may have felt for him awhile ago was dissipated now in the relief which his presence brought. She had a strange feeling of rescue. . . .

"What's the matter? What's wrong? You're trembling," he said.

She swayed toward him and he put his arm around her.

"The height—made me giddy," she gasped. "Almost thought I'd have to jump over—"

"My God, I'll never let you on the cliffs again," he said. "Why did you come out here? Why didn't you tell me?"

"Never felt this way before," she said.

The arm about her was pressing her tightly, and

she disengaged herself. Couldn't he, even in the moment when he was earning her gratitude, keep from affection?

"All right now?" he asked.

If he sensed her repugnance he gave no indication of it.

"All right," she said. "But I'm tired—I want to go home."

"We'll be snug in bed in Resaurie in half an hour," he promised. "Nice party, eh?"

"I guess so," she said.

"Come along," he ordered.

So he was going to ignore his confession, eh? Well, it was better that way. They couldn't quarrel over it. He'd kissed Helen Wilson and professed regret. Unless he mentioned it again she wouldn't. At least, she'd try not to. With feminine logic and candor, she knew that she would mention it—at least once.

They said their good-bys and half an hour later, as he had promised, they were at home. It was a half hour of silence, and their good nights were perfunctory. Joyce was asleep ten minutes later.

And it was sometime after that that she became conscious that someone was shaking her into wakefulness. She opened her eyes. Bending over her, fully dressed, was her husband.

"Wake up. Listen to me," he was saying. "Weddon is dead. Found at the foot of that cliff at the Reserve. Pushed over. Now listen: the *gens d'armes* will be here soon. Billy Valdemagara phoned. You—were—not—out—on—that cliff! Understand?"

## CHAPTER XVIII

**A** COUPLE of hours after he had met her, Tracy had seen this girl who was now his wife in bed. As she stared up at him now he saw something that had not been in her eyes when, starving, she had intrusted herself to his care. Then he had marveled at the courage that could summon mockery to the black eyes with the deep shadows beneath them. She had even jested at the fact that she, who had spoken of her virtue, should have been in his bedroom an hour later.

That was because, he knew, she had trusted him, had no fear of him. But now there was stark alarm in her expression. The intimacies that had sprung up between them since their marriage, intimacies that despite their strange bargain necessarily arose between two who traveled in the same suite on an ocean liner, who shared the same hotel apartment and villa, had never frightened her.

But this morning—yesterday morning it had become—he had undermined her confidence in him. Gifted with a knack at self-analysis, he had little understanding of the ways of others. Further, he was romantic, the sort of man who must enshrine the object of his love. It was this that had held him back, always, from sordid affairs with women. And one does not learn about women, unfortunately, from

avoidance with them. The spectator may learn the rules, but he does not learn to play the game.

Always examining into his own heart, questioning his own motives, he had great incapacity for understanding the motives of others. Chivalry, after all, unhappy though the realization may be, consists usually of one part decency to nine parts of unsophistication.

For, had Larry Tracy been able to look coldly at the spectacle of himself and Joyce, he would have said that she was deliberately provocative. When normal people enter in an abnormal arrangement, they must act abnormally if the arrangement is to persist. But Joyce breakfasted with Larry in her own dressing or bedroom. She let him see her in various stages of negligee that did not tend to decrease her charm. She was either the most natural woman that ever breathed, or else she was a most deliberate coquette, but he, being what he was, merely thought her natural. He believed that her trust in him was so profound that it never entered her pretty head that he would think of violating their agreement.

Her limp coldness in his embrace yesterday morning had tended to confirm this belief of his, and now the horror in her eyes made this belief more definite.

He felt an ache of self-pity. Yesterday morning she might have thought that she was rejecting something unworthy of him and her, but when, at the Reserve to-night, he had told her of his love, that should have convinced her that he would never again offer her anything less than all a man could offer.

Did one impulsive kiss damn a man? Was she, who professed to have suffered at the hands of men,

so quick to judge? Pity for himself gave way to quick resentment at her misunderstanding of his visit, and that, in turn gave way to the exigencies of the situation.

"Understand?" he repeated.

Her first impression seemed to leave her. The fear in her eyes gave way to bewilderment. Then their black depths lightened as the fog of sleep rolled away. She sat up in bed, drawing closer an open pajama collar.

"Weedon is dead?" she said.

"Murdered, Billy says," he told her.

"And you—you want me to deny that I was out on the cliff?"

He nodded.

"But why?" she demanded. "What possible difference does it make whether I was out there or not?" Then an interpretation of his excited insistence came to her, and she laughed aloud. "Surely you don't think I murdered him?"

"Good God, no," he exclaimed. "But the French police——"

"You mean they'll think so? Larry, don't be ridiculous. Why should they think that?"

"I don't know that they'll think anything," he protested. "But—the scandal—they'll ask questions, be suspicious——"

"What scandal? Oh," she colored slightly, "you mean that his seeing you with Helen Wilson——"

The agony in his eyes made her stop in the middle of the sentence.

"I mean that he told about seeing us," he blurted. "The *gens d'armes* probably know all about that; or

why would they be on their way here? They've seen Billy—questioned him—if you say you were out on the cliff——”

She eyed him closely. “Do they know that you struck him?”

“Probably,” he admitted.

“Then you don’t want them to know that you went out there and found me?”

He looked reproachfully at her.

“Please, Joyce. You know I wouldn’t ask you to lie to save me from anything.”

Some imp of perversity prompted her response.

“How do I know that? A man will go to the woman who jilted him, make a spectacle of himself for all Biarritz——”

“Now that,” he interrupted, “is the first unworthy thing I’ve ever heard you say.”

“How do you know it’s unworthy? And unworthy of whom—and what? Unworthy of you? How do I know what’s worthy of you? And how do you know what’s unworthy of me?”

“How do I know,” he countered, “that the sun will rise to-morrow morning?”

“For three o’clock in the morning—it’s about that, isn’t it?—that is a pretty speech,” she smiled. “Well, for a man who can be gallant at such an hour, one must make concessions. It was unworthy of me, Larry. I know you’re not trying to protect yourself from any accusation. At least,” her eyes narrowed, “I wouldn’t want to think so. Larry, you didn’t, by any chance, kill Weedon, did you?”

“If you know I’m not trying to protect myself from

an accusation, why do you ask that question?" he inquired.

"I don't know," she replied. "I shouldn't have. Only—"

"Suppose I had killed Weedon?" he asked.

Her reply frightened him, almost, in its intensity.

"Then," she said, "I would commit every perjury for you."

"You'd do that?" He could not keep amazement from his tones.

"Why not?" she retorted.

"Why?" was all he could counter.

She shrugged slightly, and threw strain away from her as lightly as she might have discarded a cloak.

"After all, you know," she reminded him, "we're married to each other."

"But perjury—Joyce, do you—care for me?"

She laughed, and none who overheard the gayety of her voice could have dreamed that a moment ago it had been searing in its intensity.

"Larry, what a child you are! Wouldn't any woman lie to save her husband from the charge of murder? After all, to be a murderer's wife—or widow—is not exactly an entrancing prospect."

"So that's it?" His voice was adolescent in its hurt surprise.

"Well, it could hardly be the other, could it?" she jibed.

If, for a moment or so, she had seemed to lose command of the situation, she was mistress of it now. He wondered, vaguely, if there would ever arise any occasion in her life when she would admit defeat, when she would be so far from mockery—of herself

and of life itself—that she would be unable to inject into any situation her own gay, defiant courage. For even when she was starving, there had been savage mockery of herself in her speech.

He abandoned side issues.

"You'll say you weren't out there, then?"

She shook her head.

"Larry, you want to avoid scandal, don't you?"

"That's pretty evident," he said stiffly.

"But you can't, my dear boy. *We* can't. Weedon told too many people—I'm not chiding, or scolding, or reminding you now—but the fact is that practically everyone at the Reserve to-night knows that you and Helen—well, knows about it. And be sure that all of them didn't resent Weedon as Billy Valdemagara did."

"What did he do?" demanded Larry quickly.

"What you did: struck Weedon."

"Did he tell you?"

She thought a moment.

"No-o, he didn't exactly say so. At least, I don't remember that he said it in so many words. Perhaps, he did, though. Anyway, his hand was bleeding and—he didn't deny it when I guessed. Why?" The question was an afterthought prompted by his strange expression.

"I don't know—Billy struck him, eh? When was that, do you know?"

"Before we went swimming. At least, he told me about it before we went to the Casino. Larry, you aren't thinking——"

"I don't know what I'm thinking," he interrupted.

"Billy isn't the type to do murder," she said.

"I haven't said he was, have I?"

She was exasperated.

"Larry, say what you do or don't mean, please," she cried.

"But I'm telling you—I'm too bewildered. Of course Billy didn't do it. But someone did, and—"

Through the house reverberated the tones of a bell. Resaurie's owners had not been able to resist, at some antique shop in near-by Bayonne, the attractions of a bell that once had graced some monastery, high in the Pyrenees. They had placed it, most incongruously, in the arched doorway of the villa. No one ever used it. An obvious electric button drew the modern finger even more quickly than the ancient bell drew the beauty-loving eye.

But to-night someone was lifting the great clapper and letting it swing against the brazen sides. Joyce thought of high-flown passages in romantic literature where bells heralded doom. . . .

"What on earth is that?" she gasped.

On the door of Larry's room sounded excited knocking. He called a question, received a reply and turned to Joyce. But she had caught the words, "Monsieur le Prefect," and understood them.

"Billy didn't anticipate them by very long, did he?" she laughed. She was as cool, thought Larry, as though nocturnal police visitations were no novelty to her. He caught himself wondering if they were. Girls who knew men like Rogan, who gave money to creatures like the courtesan in the Casino yesterday . . .

"Remember, you weren't out on the cliff—"

She interrupted him almost savagely.

"Remember that we were, both of us," she said. "Don't you suppose they'll question other people? Why on earth are they coming here unless they already know that there was a quarrel between you and Weedon? That means they've already questioned other people. This is a *murder*, Larry. Murders aren't lightly dismissed. Any trifling falsehood will seem important. We can't avoid scandal. Well, let's not invite something graver than that."

Her cool logic impressed him, even while it angered him. How could she think so clearly at a moment like this? Of course, she was right. One cannot lie to police investigating a murder without subjecting one's self to gravest suspicion. But how did she know this? Or, knowing this, how could she think of it when she ought to be in a high state of excitement? Did her coolness argue a previous experience with midnight visits from the police?

He hated himself for the unbidden thoughts that came to him. He loved her. And why, loving her, should he have doubts about her? Ah, but he'd already answered that question. No matter what she was, he must love her, and this was the hideous thing about love, this love.

"You get into something—something warm," he said. "I'll go downstairs."

Even while he thought of her well-being, his other thoughts brought harshness to his voice. The trembling maid who waited on the landing shrank from the fierce expression of his face. These mad Americans. So kindly and generous, yet—so savage. But what could one expect of a man, of any nationality, whom the police visited at such an hour? She crossed

herself as he passed her, and muttered a prayer in her Basque *patois*. Then she rushed into Joyce's bedroom to offer assistance to her mistress and perhaps to revel in her mistress' alarm. For surely Madame must be alarmed at such a visitation as this.

In the salon downstairs, Larry found awaiting him three whiskered, truculent individuals, whose ferocity was a matter of bartering merely, and had little to do with their inner beings. Two of them were in uniform and capes, and the other was in ordinary civilian clothes. This latter introduced himself with unction. He was M. le Prefect of Police, and he would, with Monsieur's permission, venture to ask a few questions.

"But," protested Larry, "the hour——"

"Ah, Monsieur spoke most justly. But there were matters which were of an importance so great that convenience must not be considered."

For a fleeting second Larry dallied with the idea of asking what was this matter of importance? Then he remembered tales of the excellence of the French espionage system even in times of peace. Perhaps the police did not already know that the Marquis had telephoned, but they were sure to learn, from one of the servants, that the telephone had rung ten minutes ago. The call would be traced to the Marquis. Perhaps a curious Central had already heard the Marquis' warning. No, it was better to be frank.

"Weedon's murder?" he asked.

The Prefect eyed him sternly.

"And what do you know of that deplorable occurrence, Monsieur?"

"Not a thing in the world," said Larry.

"But you knew that it happened, eh?" The Prefect rubbed his hands together with anticipatory triumph.

"Why, of course," said Larry with utter innocence. "My friend, the Marquis de Valdemagara, just telephoned me of the sad happening."

The Prefect's eyes lost their light.

"But of course," he agreed. "The Marquis would naturally inform you, eh? Considering that you were an intimate of the murdered American."

Larry shook his head.

"I wouldn't say that we were intimate. Slight acquaintances, that's all."

The Prefect nodded.

"Not friends?"

Larry shook his head again.

"Most certainly not," he said.

"Enemies?" questioned the Prefect.

"I wouldn't say that either, Monsieur," replied Larry. "One demands of an enemy a character as high as one demands of a friend."

The Prefect beamed upon him. Such phraseology, thoroughly high flown and Gallic, appealed to him.

"Monsieur is a gentleman," he declared. "Shall we sit down?"

## CHAPTER XIX

THE Prefect nodded to the two *gens d'armes* and their tense attitude relaxed. They took chairs, however, near the door. The very thought of flight might be ridiculous, but they were taking no chances of an attempt at escape, Larry noted. He took a chair by the fireplace, bent over and touched a match to the wood laid there, and straightened up to find the eyes of the Prefect fixed upon him.

"It is always well, Monsieur, to be frank," said the Prefect.

Larry bowed. There seemed to be no other answer to this statement.

"This Weedon—neither friend nor enemy, eh? We have, then, arrived at that," said the Prefect. "One of the type that one does not challenge, but—thrashes, eh?"

"Perhaps," admitted Larry.

"And the reason for the thrashing of Weedon?" inquired the Prefect.

"You spoke of frankness, Monsieur," said Larry. "Why ask a question whose answer you already know?"

"Because it is my duty to do so," was the reply. Into the official's expression crept a hint of that truculence which had been mitigated by his pleasant manner.

"Weedon spoke of matters that were not his concern," said Larry.

The Frenchman nodded.

"Of—an indiscretion on the part of Monsieur?"

"It might be called that," confessed Larry.

He felt his cheeks burning. His friends, his acquaintances, his servants, the general public, the police—all of these would know of the kiss that he and Helen had exchanged out on the cliff. Inwardly he writhed, though, save for his blush, he preserved an outward calm. And his sufferings were not solely for himself. After all, he had once cared for Helen, and she must care for him now. If she had not really loved him during the days of their engagement, she loved him now. If, in love, she had forgotten or disdained the fact of his marriage, and kissed him, it was an unfair price that she would be made to pay for her yielding. Why should she be involved in terrific scandal? She couldn't stand it. No decent young girl could, and Helen was decent.

In this day and age people didn't care very greatly if a young girl found herself in love with a married man, or if a married man were guilty of a quasi-infidelity. Not if the matter were a bit of intimate gossip. But newspaper notoriety—and this could not be avoided—was another affair. The most highly placed could not survive that. So he thought, forgetting that in recent years men of great distinction had been known to have mistresses, and the liaisons had become known through tragedies which had been shrieked in the headlines of the world, without apparent financial or even social detriment. But, of course, with a girl it was different.

"There is a young woman, eh, Monsieur?" asked the Prefect.

"Is this necessary?" asked Larry.

"I have already reminded Monsieur that I have my duty," said the Prefect. "One appreciates that Monsieur is a gentleman. But Monsieur must also appreciate the fact that a great crime has been committed."

"You are certain that it is murder, not an accident?" asked Larry.

The Frenchman shrugged. "Monsieur Weedon's body was found on the edge of the beach. His clothing was saturated. There was, however, no water in his lungs. Also, there was a bruise on the forehead which must have caused death."

"He might have fallen from the cliff and struck on the rocks below," suggested Larry.

"That is a thought that has also occurred to me, Monsieur," said the Frenchman, "but the facts, unfortunately, do not warrant that conclusion. There are no rocks at the base of the cliff, none, at least, on which a body could strike in falling. But we will not debate possibilities, if Monsieur pleases. We will rather confine ourselves to the putting of questions by myself, and the answering of them by Monsieur."

Again the whiskered face seemed pugnacious, and Larry bowed once more.

"I'm ready to answer any question," he stated.

"The lady, the young lady, with whom Monsieur committed the indiscretion referred to—the act was observed by Monsieur Weedon, eh?"

"It was, unfortunately," said Larry.

"There were words," suggested the Prefect.

"There were," said Larry.

"Monsieur will be kind enough to relate the conversation."

Larry drew a long breath.

"How can I remember what he said or what I said?" he objected. "He—his words or his manner—or both—were insulting. I took hold of him, shook him, hurt him slightly. Then I told him that every time I saw him I would thrash him. He left me. He made no reply to that. The lady and I—returned to the Reserve restaurant."

The detective breathed heavily.

"Concise, Monsieur. I congratulate you. Few men are as terse as you. And—in the restaurant—but we shall arrive there later. Let us go back. This lady, Monsieur—an old friend?"

Larry looked at him. If the Prefect didn't know already the relation that had existed once between Helen and himself, he would know by to-morrow morning. He might as well be frank now.

"We were once engaged to be married," he said.

"Ah. How long ago?"

"Within a couple of months," he reluctantly replied.

"The lady broke the engagement, of course? One understands the gallantry of a gentleman, Monsieur."

"There is no gallantry, Monsieur," said Larry. "It is the truth. She broke the engagement."

"The world knew of this?"

Larry shrugged. "The American newspapers made a great deal of it. And of my subsequent marriage." What was the use of withholding matters that the French police would easily find out?

The Prefect whistled sympathetically.

"These embarrassments—ah, well, we will now return to the restaurant. What happened then?"

"I told my wife what had happened."

The Frenchman's whiskered chin dropped upon his chest.

"Monsieur told his wife? But one understands that in America these matters are not looked upon, by wives, with the same broad understanding that the wives of France adopt. You told your wife. Exactly what did you tell her?"

"That—well, I told her what I considered necessary," replied Larry. He could not bring himself to state that he had kissed Helen.

"Did you consider it necessary to tell Madame that you had kissed the lady?"

Larry's shoulders sagged hopelessly. The Prefect knew all the gossip.

"I did," he answered.

"Jacques!" The Prefect's voice was harsh with triumph. "You will run upstairs, my child, and bring down to me, immediately, Madame Tracy."

The *gen d'armes* nearer the door arose swiftly, and was on his way upstairs before Larry could protest. And when his mouth opened the Prefect closed it with a sentence.

"Monsieur will be good enough to consider himself under orders to remain silent," he snapped.

Larry sank back into his chair. A maxim of Hogan, his butler, came back to him over fifteen years.

"Never argue with a cop, Master Larry," the old man had said. Larry had remembered it on other occasions when he had been stopped for speeding

and had observed the maxim. He observed it now.

Jacques returned in less than a minute, and with him, dressed charmingly in a costume that Larry would have been hard put to describe, was Joyce. Perhaps it was a negligee—if women wore them any more—and perhaps it was a frock. Larry hadn't seen it. He only knew, with an ache, that his wife looked more delicious than he had ever seen her before. The skirt was less scant than the ordinary dress she wore, and there were folds of soft silk that draped the upper part of her body. He didn't know until she told him later, that it was a lounging thing for the beach, to be worn when she was tired of pajamas. All he knew was that its gay orange color set off her brunette beauty.

Monsieur le Prefect knew this, too. His bow from the waist and his clicking heels, and the Japanesey sibilance of his indrawn breath were frank admissions of Joyce's charm.

"One is desolated to disturb Madame," he said.

He spoke now in perfect English.

"But when there has been murder done, one expects, if one has the faintest information bearing on the matter, to be disturbed," replied Joyce.

"Madame will sit down? Madame will arrange herself comfortably. Ah. Now Madame will please answer a question. Madame will please tell me if her husband, this night, at the Restaurant Reserve, stated to Madame that he had—ah—kissed the young lady, Mademoiselle Wilson, to whom he had formerly been affianced."

Joyce's eyebrows drew together in the beginning of

a frown. But it was not a frown of anger, but rather a frown of puzzlement.

"Of course he did," she answered. "Why shouldn't he tell me?"

Once again the Prefect's jaw dropped, and his long and cherished beard wagged almost grotesquely. Without waiting for any comment from him, Joyce went on speaking.

"Why shouldn't he tell me that he kissed a dear friend? Is there any reason why he shouldn't?" Her voice was bland, child-like.

"Why—er—Monsieur Weedon—your husband," the Prefect had lost his perfect aplomb, "struck Mr. Weedon——"

"Of course he did," said Joyce. "When a man misinterprets, *vilely* misinterprets, an innocent greeting—why, Larry told me at once, told me that Mr. Weedon had completely misunderstood——"

"Then, Madame, I am to take it that you were not disturbed at your husband's action?"

"Why, of course not," she answered. Her manner grew suddenly arch. "If my husband *sneaked* out, furtively, that would be a different matter." Larry did not look at her. He fought against the color rising in his cheeks. "But to exchange an innocent caress with an old and dear friend—that is something else, Monsieur. You, a man of experience, understand that."

The Prefect caressed his mustaches.

"Of course, Madame. But then—Monsieur was angered at Monsieur Weedon, but you were not angry at Monsieur?"

Joyce rose and walked to where Larry sat. She put

an arm about his shoulders. Her head bent and her lips brushed his, ever so lightly, but enough to let him know how cold they were.

"How could I be angry with my husband? If he kissed his sister would I be angry?"

"An ex-fiancée is not a sister, Madame," said the Prefect.

"No," she laughed, "but the affection between them is that of a brother and sister."

"Madame," said the Prefect, "is a woman of great understanding. Madame should be French."

"Monsieur should be American," retorted Joyce.

"At least," said the Prefect grandiloquently, "there should be a bond between these two great nations. The Americans should understand the position of the French. Consider, if you will, the matter of the debt. Is it well, I ask, for the future amity of these two great republics, that there should be bickering about a matter of money? Bah! Money! Between brothers who have bled together!"

"The debt," said Joyce instantly, "should be canceled."

"Madame," said the Prefect, "I salute you."

He bent over her hand, and Joyce resisted an impulse to giggle as his whiskers tickled her palm. His lips smacked in a resounding kiss upon her hand. He straightened up.

"There are, if Madame and Monsieur will forgive me, a few other trifling matters. You were neither of you out upon the cliff after the—er—fraternal greeting given to Mademoiselle Wilson by your husband?"

"Why, yes, we were," said Joyce. "I was suffer-

ing from a slight headache. I stood outside, a moment or two, and my husband joined me. This was after our bathing party."

"You heard no noise, no sound of a struggle?"

Joyce shook her head. "I didn't."

"And you, Monsieur?" The Prefect turned to Larry.

He also shook his head. "Not a word."

"Did either of you hear of any other quarrel in which Monsieur Weedon had become involved?"

Larry waited for Joyce to reply. When she did her voice was perfectly calm.

"Why, no," she answered.

Now, this was a deliberate lie, and not the first that he had heard Joyce utter. But, whereas he had resented, been angered by other lies, he rejoiced at this one.

"I didn't, either," he put in.

The Prefect turned the channel of the talk.

"Tell me what you know of Monsieur Weedon," he said to Larry.

"I know very little," said Larry. "He went to the same university with me in America. I knew him only slightly. I've run across him on my occasional trips to Europe."

"You knew, of course, that he—ah—Madame will forgive me—permitted himself to be supported by the earnings of a woman in the Casino?"

"Good God, no," exclaimed Larry.

"You thought he had money?" persisted the Prefect.

"I never gave it a thought either way," said Larry.

"I'd heard—rumors, you know. But one pays little attention to gossip."

"So? I adore it," said the Frenchman. "Still, if you know nothing of him—the lady did not mention him to-day?"

"What lady?" asked Larry in bewilderment.

"Mademoiselle Novel, the American—ah—*habituée* of the Casino. The lady who cares—too greatly—for Monsieur Weedon, and who replenished his purse on occasion. The lady with whom you talked this afternoon in the Casino, Monsieur?"

The faintest gasp came from the lips of Joyce. The Prefect turned swiftly to her.

"Do not misunderstand, Madame. The attention Monsieur paid the lady in question was merely that gallantry which is inseparable from frequenting the Casino. When a lady speaks to a man, it is but *gentil* that he buy her a *fin* or perhaps a glass of champagne."

"Of course," said Joyce. But her eyes burned into Larry's until he dropped them.

"Mademoiselle Novel did not refer to Mr. Weedon, then?"

Larry shook his head.

"She spoke of her luck at *boule*, and I bought her a glass of wine. That is all."

"But naturally. With Madame at home, one knows that there is no question of flirtation." He bowed deeply to Joyce. "I am forgiven my intrusion? Then I shall depart."

## CHAPTER XX

LARRY escorted M. le Prefect and his two companions to the front gate, where they parted with many bows and expressions of esteem. Alone in the garden, he lighted a cigarette. The night breeze was sweet with the perfume of flowers, alive with the tang of the sea. From over Chiberta Way, where the new golf course was situated, came a piny fragrance. A bird, on a bough overhead scolded Larry because his sleep had been invaded by human noises. Up the steep grade of the Avenue Edouard Sept a *fiacre* labored, and the driver encouraged his patient animal with snatches of a song.

Even in the night, the whole atmosphere of the place radiated gayety. Such things as murder, police activities, suspicions, seemed utterly alien and out of the picture. Of course, there were the mean whispers, the sordid hints, the byplay of sex intrigues in Biarritz. But those were matters inseparable from any spot where wealth gathered from the corners of the earth for pastime. They were harmless activities. At least, they harmed only those who engaged in them, and tragedy rarely emerged from them. The worst that ever happened was a divorce proceeding and that, most people were convinced, was a natural and logical outgrowth of marriage.

He threw away his cigarette and moved toward the house, frowning at himself. It was all very well for

him to be cynical about his friends, but it was not so well for him to be cynical about himself. Divorce was something to be accepted with a shrug when it happened to someone else, but if one took it too lightly, then there was the chance, always, of so molding one's attitude that one expected it to occur to one's self. Receptive attitudes invite assaults. Why, only this evening, in the emotion engendered by Helen's embrace, he had found himself looking at the specter of divorce without disfavor. He, who had really believed that marriage was a sacrament, a thing to be entered into only because one could not live without possession of the loved one, had for a moment considered it something that a word could dissolve.

But that was because he had violated all the traditions of his family, all the precepts that many Tracys had resolved into practice. He had married in a senseless fit of pique, not because his heart commanded. So it was natural that, having taken marriage in his stride, so to speak, he could look at divorce as something to be taken with equal carelessness.

At the doorway he paused, grinding his cigarette into the path.

What sort of bloodless creature was he becoming? In the midst of matters that required action, he was giving himself over to inner philosophical debate. When it was required that he think of matters immediate, he thought of far-away things, speculated on his frame of mind, how it had been acquired, how it might be changed.

The maid had not been the only one aroused by the police visitation. In the hall at the foot of the stairs were the cook, butler, another chambermaid

and the kitchen-maid. They scattered at Larry's entrance, with many a backward glance. Only the butler retained presence of mind.

"We did not know but that Monsieur and Madame, awakened thus, would require something to eat," he suggested.

Larry shook his head. He knew that the servants, anticipating an arrest, had gathered together that they might witness the delectable spectacle, and ascertain its reasons. But that was natural. So he thanked the man and went upstairs.

The door opening into Joyce's room was ajar and she called to him as he entered. Her maid had lighted a fire and before it his wife sat, smoke trailing from a cigarette in her fingers.

"So you talked with Miss Novel, eh?" she greeted him.

He had felt, all evening, upon the defensive, and when a man has offered apology for a wrong, and the apology has been waved aside, resentment soon usurps humility's place in his heart.

"I believe you'd talked with her first," he said.

"Did she volunteer the information, or did you discover it by spying?" she asked. "Of course," she mimicked the Prefect, "that gallantry which is inseparable from frequenting the Casino . . ."

Her black eyes had blazing depths in them now, points of fire that scorched his soul.

"I asked nothing about you," he defended himself. "But if I had, I'd have found out that you lied to me about her."

"Oh, that," she shrugged. "After all, this is France, and you are a husband. And where gentle-

men find it inseparable from gallantry to buy champagne for women who keep men, perhaps it is only natural that wives should lie to their husbands."

It was childish, this quarrel, and he knew it. Perhaps its original causes might have some dignity—if recriminations can have such a quality—but their words were juvenile.

"I'm inclined to believe that you've had practice in deceit," he retorted. "The convincing way in which you said that you knew of no other quarrel in which Weedon had been involved . . ."

"Would you have liked it better if I'd told the Prefect that Billy had struck him?" she challenged.

He colored at this. "You know perfectly well that I wouldn't. I'm only stating that falsehood comes naturally to you."

"Which is, of course, a gallantry inseparable from such an occasion as this," she jeered. "And you *are* a man of gallantry. Miss Novel in the afternoon, and Helen Wilson in the evening. You didn't, by any chance, honor Miss Novel with an embrace? I should hate to think so. Helen might not like that."

"Joyce, please," he begged. "This is intolerable."

"Intolerable for whom?" she cried. "For me, or for you? Did I enter your room and denounce you for a harmless falsehood that saved a friend from great embarrassment? You don't believe Billy killed him, do you?"

"Of course not," he said.

"Then why object because I saved him from suspicion by a white lie? For that matter, you lied about it yourself. And did you object to my pretense of affection for you? That was false, false as anything

I ever did or said in all my life. Would you prefer it if I told the police that I did *not* like your kissing your ex-fiancée? Would you prefer it if I said that I hated you?"

On that first time when he had met her, he had asked if she were ill. Her eyes had blazed at him. "Damn you," she had said, "I'm hungry."

The same rage, a rage so great that it seemed impersonal, as though its scope embraced the whole world and was too great to center on any one single individual, shone in her eyes now. It was as though she rebelled against the very Fate that had caused her to be born. A moment ago Larry had found humility unendurable and had disclosed his own anger. But that anger of his was a puny thing; before the blast of her wrath it shriveled.

"Do you hate me?" he asked.

"That," she said, "is a matter that neither of us could help, isn't it? So why discuss it? I'm sleepy," she announced.

There was nothing for Tracy to do but leave her then, and he did so with what grace he could muster, and with the unaccountable feeling that he had been in some way worsted by her.

Her door was closed when he awoke next morning, and there came from her room no invitation to breakfast, so he drank his morning coffee—most dreadful stuff it was, too; he could never become accustomed to French coffee—and ate his rolls alone. It suddenly came to him that, little as Joyce had granted, it would be unendurable if she withdrew that little.

Not to be permitted those innocuous intimacies which had begun to mean so much to him; to be denied

that *camaraderie* which had become sweeter than ever the kisses that Helen had permitted. . . . He fell into that self-pitying reverie which sometimes leads to rashness, and might indeed have been led into a renewal of his quarrel with Joyce had it not been for the arrival of Billy Valdemagara.

That red-headed scion of Spanish aristocracy was in a high state of excitement.

"The police—they came here?" These were his first words as Larry met him in the salon.

"What did they have to say? Did you tell them anything?"

Larry stared at him. "What could we tell him, Billy?"

"About my striking him? Not that I'd have blamed you if you had. After all, when there is a murder—whew!" He mopped his forehead.

"But we didn't," Larry assured him. He told the Marquis what had transpired last night.

"And your wife—*valgame Dios*, but she is glorious, Larry. Any other woman would have blurted out that I had hit him—Where is she?"

"She'll be down any minute, Billy," said Larry. How could he tell his friend that he had not ventured to enter his wife's bedroom, and that he was unaware whether or not she had yet awakened, even.

But Joyce entered the room as he was professing an intimacy that didn't exist. She greeted the Marquis warmly. He bent over her hand.

"I was just telling the unworthy man who had the great good fortune to be your husband of my gratitude at your silence last night," said Billy.

Joyce laughed. "Did you think we'd tell of your

quarrel with Weedon? Billy, how little you regard us."

The Marquis vehemently shook his red head.

"Not so," he protested. "But as I was saying to Larry, when there has been murder, the little discretions frequently disappear."

Joyce smiled upon him, but her voice was hard.

"But I had to pretend that the—er—pretty little incident on the cliff, between Larry and—well, I had to pretend that that was nothing but a fraternal and sisterly salute. If you, as well as my husband, had resented Weedon's telling what he had observed, it might naturally occur to the Prefect that perhaps I didn't take it very lightly after all."

"I don't think that follows at all," protested the Marquis. "You were just—magnificent—as always. His voice grew serious. "My children, this affair—is serious."

"Murder is never a light matter," said Joyce.

"Of course not," assented Billy. "But I mean—for all of us."

Now what he said was so obvious that Larry wondered that the Marquis had thought it necessary to voice it. But Valdemagara was not the sort to talk idly save when he flattered some pretty woman.

"What are you driving at, Billy?" he inquired.

"A *cause célèbre*, that's what the French public is always demanding and what the French police are always trying to supply," said the Marquis. "High-life scandal—you know what I mean. Rich American—titled Spaniard—get it?"

"But the Prefect was so courteous last night," began Joyce.

"You are a very beautiful woman, and the police would be polite to you on your way to the guillotine," said the Marquis. "Don't misunderstand me. I mean —well, all that I mean is that I'm afraid you'll be annoyed, harassed, questioned——"

Joyce's brow was serene. "That can't be helped, and what cannot be helped must be borne. Isn't that so? So let's not concern ourselves about it. In the meantime—do we swim?"

"Why not?" assented Valdemagara.

He had no bathing suit with him, but Larry offered to fit him out, so they went upstairs, and he and Larry dressed in the latter's bedroom. Although the door was closed between Larry's room and Joyce's, the Marquis kept his voice lowered.

"Nasty mess, eh, Larry?"

"Well, you've been harping on that side of it quite awhile, Billy. Are you driving at anything special?"

"Try to buy a ticket for Paris," said the Marquis sharply.

Larry struggled into the shirt of his swimming suit. His head emerged, hair rumpled and cheeks flushed.

"Drop the riddles and talk English," he snapped. The Marquis met his glance fairly.

"Larry, a man was murdered last night. You had a quarrel with him, struck him. The police are aware of that. I also struck him. The police were not aware of that last night."

"Then how did they happen to see you last night?" asked Larry.

"I was there—there when his body was found," replied Billy. "The party had broken up, but there was the little matter of the check to be paid, and the

proprietor of La Reserve would have me honor him by sampling some ancient brandy—a waiter found the body, and—it was I who telephoned for the *gens d'armes*. Now, the proprietor knew that you had struck Weedon. The man Weedon had no shame. He had told the incident himself, waiters had overheard it discussed—the police would learn it by this morning, so I interposed no objection when my friend the proprietor told them. But I did not find it necessary to inform them of my own little affair with Weedon. Only your wife knew of that."

"Yet, if she told——"

The Marquis cut him short. "It would have hurt me immeasurably with Monsieur le Prefect. But I was confident that your wife would not tell."

Larry whistled. "You were taking considerable chance, Larry. It would have sounded all right if you'd told it, but if someone else mentioned it when you'd kept quiet—not so good, my lad."

"I was aware of that," returned Billy quietly.

Larry pondered this a moment, then dismissed it from his mind.

"About my leaving here? You don't mean that I'd be stopped?"

"But naturally," said the Spaniard.

"But they *can't* suspect——"

"The French police suspect *everyone* of everything," said Valdemagara. "That's why they're so much more efficient than the coppers in your dear old New York, Larry. But I'm not trying to alarm you."

"Then what are you trying to do?" demanded Larry.

"I'm trying to get it into your none too bright brain that it's up to us to find out who *did* kill Weedon," replied Billy. "If the guilty person is found, that would tend to stop a lot of idle gossip, wouldn't it?"

"Oh, gossip," snarled Larry.

"Yes, gossip," repeated the Marquis. "Gossip is important in that narrow world of ours which considers itself so big, my friend. For instance, gossip would hurt Miss Wilson, would hurt you, might even—conceivably—hurt Mrs. Tracy."

"Well, what on earth do you want me to do?" cried Larry.

"I wondered if there is any possible hint—Weedon was a compatriot of yours. You went to college with him? Can you think of anyone who might want to do him an injury, for example?"

"I don't know any of his friends," said Larry shortly. "But the Prefect spoke of a woman—a Miss Novel—she'd been keeping him, according to the Prefect. God pity the poor thing, but—no, I can't think of a person. I hardly knew the man. You knew him better than I, I'd imagine, Billy."

The Marquis shrugged.

"As a casual acquaintance, who knew the same people I know—not in their houses, but in the bars and restaurants and Casinos—oh, well, shall we swim?"

"Let's," agreed Larry.

He knocked on Joyce's door.

"With you in a minute," she called. And in hardly more time than that they had crowded into a *fiacre* and were galloping down the avenue toward the beach.

## CHAPTER XXI

THE throng on the *esplanada* was the same as yesterday. Before the ground floor of the Casino, where were the public dressing rooms, Argentinian elbowed Pole, and Spaniard crowded Italian to the wall. A dozen different tongues smote the air, and every variety of fashionable masculine wearing apparel flaunted in the sunshine. Of course, the women all wore practically the same thing. Feminine fashions are standardized the world over, and no male may tell that one frock is hopelessly out of date while another is daringly in advance of the fashions.

But men, the more conservative sex, reluctantly abandon a style. So the Englishman wore his ill-fitting but beautifully made clothing, and the American wore his perfect-fitting but badly made garments, and the Argentinian scuffed the sand in his pointed patent leathers, and practically all of them, to prove that they were gay and care free, wore on their heads the Basque *béret*.

Children, of all races, played on the beach. Women lowered the tops of their bathing suits that they might acquire a burn, while men were frankly stripped to the waist.

The old woman who, for the pittance of a franc or two, looked after one's beach robes, wore the same bonnet that she had worn yesterday, a bonnet that made her look like an elderly British royalty or royal-

ty's only rival in dowdiness, a respectable Newport matron.

The same life guards, trousers rolled to the knee, blew upon horns and scolded those venturesome ones who ventured too far out into the treacherous Biscay waters.

How little tragedy mattered in this world, after all. Murder had been done last night; the local newspapers had printed brief accounts of the crime; the news-stands flaunted bulletins. But nobody cared. What was one death more or less in a world that, though it looked the other way, always carried in its consciousness the knowledge that death was imminent, that it always was lying in wait around the corner?

No one that Joyce had met yesterday seemed to be on the beach. Joyce commented on this fact to the Marquis.

"The Côte Basque opened to-day," he replied.

"And what is the Côte Basque, and why does its opening keep the crowd from here?" she replied.

He explained to her that it was a somewhat more exclusive beach than this public bathing place, and that its formal opening for the season always drew the fashionable crowd, although he did not so denominate his friends.

"Then why didn't we go there?" Joyce asked.

But the Marquis apparently did not hear the question, for he was racing into the surf. And Joyce a moment later forgot that she had asked it, in the tingling excitement of battling the waves. Larry observed more caution to-day than yesterday, contenting himself with riding the waves close inshore. He shook spray from his face and smiled at Joyce.

"Great, isn't it?" he said.

He was permitting her, if she chose, to bury the hatchet.

"Marvelous," she replied.

After all, this man she had married was pretty much of a person. They had come right to the parting of the ways last night; both of them had said things that might better have been left unsaid. But he was not the kind to resuscitate a dead quarrel. Possibly, she unkindly mused, that was because he knew that in such a life as theirs new quarrels must arise to take the place of the old. . . .

"I've had enough," declared the Marquis.

"*It is* cold," Joyce admitted.

Ten minutes later they were back at Resaurie, divesting themselves of their wet bathing suits.

"I'd like a cocktail," Joyce called from her room. "That place we went yesterday. The Bar Basque, was it?"

"Let's," cried Larry.

He was rubbing himself down furiously with a coarse towel, and did not note the shadow on Billy's face, nor the fact that the Spaniard shrugged, and that then the shadow on his features was replaced by an expression of resignation.

The tiny café was crowded when they arrived in the square where it was situated. Save for Weedon, the group was the same as yesterday. Jeanne Mazell was holding court as usual. Her blonde curls tossed as she gave ear to this compliment and the other to that.

But the wild greetings of yesterday were absent today as Joyce and her husband and the Marquis de-

scended from their car. There was an instant hush of conversation, and a turning of faces toward the new arrivals. Suddenly Joyce remembered her unanswered question, and found its answer in the expectant faces that looked toward her.

Billy Valdemagara had not suggested taking them to the Côte Basque because he had not known what their reception would be. Generously, she thought only of Larry. Poor Larry. After all, these were his friends, this was his life. She was an intruder among them, into it, and she could very well get along if she never saw one of them again. No, she would, except Jeanne Mazell and the Marquis. But the rest of them . . .

But she had married Larry, who, apparently, had a place not merely in New York society, but in the cosmopolitan resort society. He would hate to be ousted from that place, and her cheeks were pale with the realization that she might have caused his ousting.

But—and the injustice of it angered her—was it her fault that Helen Wilson had come to Biarritz for the express purpose of letting Larry make love to her? Was it her fault that Paul Weedon should have witnessed their love scene and told about it to all who would listen? Was it her fault that Weedon had come to his death last night?

And then fright—it was that—and anger left her. For Jeanne Mazell with great deliberation, rose and called.

"Oh, Mrs. Tracy—please come and sit by me."

A simple request, a simple matter, but it won Jeanne Mazell a friend for life. For the rest took their cues from the adored blonde matron. The hesi-

tancy, the doubt, all disappeared. Cocktail glasses were thrust into the hands of the two men, and a dozen voices, male and female, greeted Joyce with the rapture inseparable from this class of people. For the butterflies of the world can do nothing calmly.

If they drink a highball, they must call "Whoopie," or whatever the stock phrase of the moment may be. Everyone is adorable, wonderful, entrancing, or else is nobody at all. Friends who have not been encountered for fully two hours are greeted as though they had been gone for years.

And butterflies, having no minds of their own, are easily led. Which, by the way, may account for the fact that practically every social dictator is someone whose present followers considered her a nobody only a decade ago.

Jeanne, in making room for Joyce, insinuated into the outer air an ardent suitor, evidently English. He eyed her reproachfully, then solaced by a smile, removed himself gracefully.

"There is gossip," said Jeanne, frankly.

Joyce nodded.

"All sorts of nasty gossip," Jeanne continued.

Again Joyce nodded.

"All of us take the home papers, you know," said Jeanne. "And of course, the speculation about Larry's bride . . ."

"What is it you wish me to say?" asked Joyce calmly, as the other paused.

"The rumor now is that you knew Weedon," said Jeanne.

"And you believe the rumor?" asked Joyce.

"You are not to quarrel with me, my dear," said Jeanne, calmly. "For we are friends."

"I want to be," Joyce told her wistfully.

"Not more than I want to," said Jeanne. "So—if I repeat gossip to you——"

"I'll not be offended," promised Joyce.

"They say that you knew Weedon extremely well in America. It was said to me. I replied that to my certain knowledge Paul has not been home in six years, so that you must have been extremely young when you knew him. But absurdities matter little to people intent on scandal. The remoter the possibility of gossip being true the saltier it seems to them. Now," and her blue eyes took on a shrewdness that Joyce had not expected to find in them, "these people here —what are they? Nobodies, really. But that makes it all the more important that you—well, make good with them. Because if one hasn't made good with nobodies, then the somebodies wonder why. Understand?"

"I think so," said Joyce.

"So I'm glad you appeared here to-day," went on Jeanne. "Not to have come would have been to confess—well, it would have been an admission of fear."

Joyce sipped her cocktail.

"I don't think, Jeanne," she said, "that I'm ever going to be successful with Larry's friends."

"Why do you say that?" asked the other girl.

"Because," said Joyce, with sudden insight, "I don't think I'll ever like them."

"You like me, don't you?" asked Jeanne.

"Of course. But you—you're different from——"

"You like Billy Valdemagara, don't you? Well,

there are lots of men like him in Larry's acquaintance. There are girls just as—well, nice—as myself."

"But there are too many like—" Joyce hesitated. She wanted not to be catty. But she went on. "Like Helen Wilson. Like Weedon. Even, like Mr. Burton."

Jeanne seized upon the last name.

"You don't like him?"

Joyce shook her head.

"Don't let him know it," counseled Jeanne.

"Why not?" Joyce asked.

"My husband—you'll *like* Jim—knows Burton well. Jim is older, you know. He told me that he wouldn't trust Burton. But Joyce, this is—all new to you, isn't it? You don't mind my saying that, do you?" she added quickly.

"Not a bit," smiled Joyce. "Yes," she admitted, "it's all new."

"Then don't judge too quickly. After all the people you may have known—did they measure up, as a class, as a whole, any better than these friends of Larry? Besides," she didn't wait for reply, "you've met only a few of the best. In a day or so, you'll meet them all, nicer people, who don't spend all their lives drinking cocktails."

New arrivals made Joyce look up. Helen Wilson, escorted by Frank Burton, had descended from a *fiacre*, and either Burton, or his wealth, was receiving an enthusiastic welcome.

Chairs were brought by waiters to the sidewalk, upon which the bar encroached. New alignments occurred in the shifting of tables, and Joyce, to her discomfort, found herself seated by Burton.

"You haven't forgotten our conversation of last night, have you, Mrs. Tracy?" he almost instantly asked her.

Joyce looked at him.

"And if I have?"

"Then, with your permission, I'll repeat what I said," he answered. His voice was discreetly lowered, and on his lips was a smile that did credit to him as an actor. It is not easy to threaten and smile at the same time.

"I remember," said Joyce.

"Then act upon your remembrance," he almost snarled.

Joyce deliberately set her cocktail glass down.

"Mr. Burton, you have threatened to cause my husband financial loss——"

"I'll ruin him," declared Burton.

"Unless," she went on composedly, "I can assure you that Miss Wilson and he——"

"All Biarritz is laughing at me," he interrupted. "At the very moment that I was telling you my fears about them—they were out in the moonlight, kissing each other——"

"You know that? Who dared tell you——"

"Well, the police weren't afraid to tell me," he said. "As a matter of fact, I knew it last night, before the police came——"

"How did you know it?" she asked.

"There are always people to tell unpleasant gossip. Weedon told me, but other people weren't far behind him."

Her eyes were puzzled. How completely she had misunderstood Weedon. She had realized, had warned

Larry, that a coward like Weedon would try to win his own self-respect by telling what he had witnessed in order that he wouldn't seem a coward to himself, but she had not dreamed that he would go to Burton. . . .

"I wanted Helen to leave Biarritz this morning," said Burton. "She wouldn't do it. Now—I'm not to be made a fool of any longer."

Joyce fought against hysterical mirth. The whole situation was too funny. Yet through its ridiculousness ran a strain of something that might prove to be a tragedy. Into her marriage had already entered tragedy, the death of Weedon. The loss of money was a lesser tragedy than death . . . but . . . could Burton make good his threat about ruining Larry? Then absurdity returned.

"Mr. Burton," she said, "my husband loves me."

"Yes," he sneered, "he showed it last night with Helen, didn't he?"

"Well," she shrugged, "if you don't think he cares for me, how do you suppose I can prevent—what you want prevented?"

"He was enough in love—or infatuated, or whatever you want to call it, to marry you," he said. "But—the kind of wife you've been to him won't hold a man. And I want him held. Understand me? I want him held."

Over her cheeks spread a red strain. If she understood him correctly, then he understood, knew, the arrangement between herself and Larry. But how could he? How was it possible for him, for anyone, to know that she and Larry were not man and wife in reality?

"I don't know what you mean," she said.

"Oh, yes, you do," he retorted. "A girl smart enough to grab Larry Tracy the way you did is smart enough to get my meaning. And ought to be smart enough to act on it. And that's all I've got to say to you, Mrs. Tracy. You say your husband loves you. Well, he wasn't so in love with you last night that he didn't kiss Helen. Now, I suppose I'm a contemptible sort of person to want a woman that evidently doesn't want me very badly."

"But we're what we are," he went on, "and all the wishing in the world can't change us from that thing, whatever it is. I want Helen. When I once get her, I'll make her want me. Oh, I know—that's the sort of thing all infatuated men say, but—with me it's true. I can hold her if I get her."

"And I'm the person who helps you get her, am I?"

Between tears and mirth Joyce's voice sounded.

"If it isn't made clear to Helen, *to-day*, that she's out so far as your husband is concerned——"

"You say," she interrupted, "that Paul Weedon told you about last night?"

"Yes," he replied. "But we're talking about something else."

"No," she retorted, "just now we're talking about Weedon. When did he tell you?"

She couldn't have told herself why she returned to the subject of Weedon. But she realized that she had been prompted by some inner angel as she noted the expression on Burton's face.

## CHAPTER XXII

**T**HAT face, which fought desperately to preserve the verisimilitude of a youth forever gone, was suddenly aged. The slim barrier between middle age and age can be overturned by the slightest assault. An evening prolonged an extra hour; a touch of a cold; a bit of worry; any of these will make fifty-five look every second of its years. And now Burton, at the mere insistent asking of a question, was an old man.

And an ugly old man; a vicious old man; an old man who had had his own way all his life and intended having it until the end. But the question had been put by Joyce more to end an unpleasant discussion, to divert Burton's mind from threat, rather than because it seemed important to her that it should be answered.

But the revelatory glimpse he gave her of his inner soul was only a glimpse after all. Frank Burton had not achieved his power without learning to control his feelings, to hide them, to assume, almost at will, that mask which was all the world saw of him. For a moment, marveling at the effect of her question upon him, Joyce had permitted all sorts of riotous ideas to flit through her mind. Perhaps Burton had killed Weedon. . . .

"When?" He interrupted her speculations. "I ran into him; he could hardly see, he was so wild.

Blurted it right out—" He broke off short, eying her curiously.

He shook his head. "Afraid it won't work, Mrs. Tracy."

She colored. "What won't work?"

"What you're thinking of," he retorted.

"How do you know what I'm thinking?" she asked. She would have withdrawn the question could she have done so. It sounded so childish. For she realized that he had read her thoughts, realized it before he gave her the benefit of his reading.

"I've made a lot of money outguessing people," he replied. "Right now in your mind you're tangling me up with Weedon's death." He laughed harshly. "Listen, Mrs. Tracy, if I'd killed him no one would be able to connect me with it. Be sure of that."

He was telling the truth, was not idly boasting. Further, the inference that he wanted to be drawn, was an honest one. He hadn't killed Weedon. But—why had his face assumed so strange an expression when she had asked him at what hour he had talked with the murdered man? She had felt that her question had been put into her mouth by some power outside her own consciously working mentality. . . . Oh, well, she'd been through a great deal, was highstrung, on edge. . . .

"That's all I've got to say to you," he told her heavily.

There were possible retorts, but the utterance of them would be a degradation, she felt. Once again she felt inclined to hysterical laughter. Only, such laughter as she would have given way to, is usually inspired by something wholly absurd, and there was a

tinge of something not absurd in Burton's threats.

He knew too much. How could he possibly know what he undoubtedly did know? Larry—her cheeks burned—was not the sort to take a confidant. She knew enough of him, already to understand that he had lived a life that, if not shy, was certainly reserved. She doubted if he had ever had any close chum. He was not the type that needs a human receptacle into which can be poured confidences too burdensome to be carried by one's self. Larry's relations with his wife would never be discussed by him. He would not go to the closest friend on earth and retail his troubles. Pride—he had plenty of it; wasn't it misguided pride that had made him marry her?—would prevent that. Then how—how had Burton discovered that which he certainly knew?

He had spoken of detectives that had looked her up, but detectives certainly couldn't know those intimate details which Burton knew. Servants might be bribed. . . . Her cheeks were more fiery now. To think that one's own servants conducted an espionage. . . . Burton was low, low, low!

But her rage and embarrassment did not blind her to the fact that the lower a person's character the more dangerous that person may be. . . .

The personnel of a cocktail party, the world over, shifts like sands before the encroachment of the surf. Alignments that seem rapturously intimate are rudely broken up by the arrival of a new guest, by the intrusion of a waiter. The Englishman who had been dismissed by Jeanne wound his way to Joyce's side. He was evidently a catholic suitor, whose ardency of

soul could not be quenched by the withdrawal of one lady.

He was rather good-looking, Joyce admitted, but his charm would have been greater had he not been conscious of it, and his glances would have been more devastating had they not been so knowingly killing. But he served to cover her embarrassment when Burton abruptly arose.

"Marvelous," said the Englishman.

Joyce resigned herself to the inevitable bald flattery. But, surprisingly, the Englishman's monosyllable was not addressed to her. It was as though he commented on some amazing fact of nature. She put the question that seemed indicated.

"I mean that old blighter who just left your side," was the reply. "They tell me that he has perfect scads of it, millions of the filthy, and that he made it all himself. Now, I ask you, is there a God in Heaven? There can't be, or he'd not let me remain a pauper and give ten million of the best to that old fossil?"

"Fossil? Hardly that," smiled Joyce.

"Fossil," insisted the Briton. "If I spent the time on the putting green that he spends in the hands of his valet, I'd be champion of England."

"Instead of being—" said Joyce.

The Englishman reverted to his type. He touched the end of his tiny waxed mustache and ogled her frankly. Vague regrets at his poverty, inspired by Burton, vanished from his happy mind. Here was his real career, woman.

"Instead of being stricken aghast by the unbelievable spectacle of America's quantity and quality pro-

duction. To think that one nation could not only produce a Mrs. Mazell, but could go on to the undreamt-of lengths and produce a Mrs. Tracy. Now, I ask you, Mrs. Tracy, is it fair? You have all the gold in the world, all the commerce, all the automobiles and radios and such chitchat, but why on earth should your country attain a monopoly on feminine beauty?"

"It *is* all wrong, isn't it," she agreed. "Can't your House of Lords do something about it?"

Beyond him, tilting a cocktail to her lips, but staring gravely, even anxiously, at Joyce, sat Helen Wilson. Her mother was not in evidence, and Burton, in the moment that had elapsed since his heavy, abrupt departure, had managed to disappear. The pretty, petulant face of Helen seemed to signal some sort of request. It was as though she were trying, wordlessly, to make an appointment, to arrange a meeting. . . .

Jeanne Mazell, flushed, breathless, exhilarated by popularity no less than by two or three cocktails, returned to Joyce's side. The Englishman, daunted by Joyce's non-receptivity, turned back to his first object of adoration. Joyce took advantage of the opportunity to so maneuver her chair that she was nearer to Helen.

"Pretty sight," she said vaguely.

Helen turned a fascinating shoulder upon the cavalier of the moment.

"You and Frank find much in common," she remarked.

Joyce lighted a cigarette.

"Larry," she laconically replied.

The blonde girl whitened until the vividness of

her lips seemed a wound inflicted upon her, a wound that pained. . . .

"He has dared to talk to you of Larry?" she breathed.

"And of you," rejoined Joyce.

"What about me?" the other demanded.

"He doesn't like the idea of you and Larry kissing," said Joyce brutally.

There was no denial, no attempt at denial, from Helen.

"He knows?" she gasped.

"Didn't you suspect as much?" inquired Joyce.

The other girl made no reply to this. Her shallow blue eyes held something as near to that pain which comes from self-revelation as one of her sort could ever feel.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

Their voices were lowered; they might, save for the tension on Helen's face, have been exchanging mischievous or idle gossip. And if a dozen eyes, curious because of gossip of last night's occurrence on the cliff, were bent upon them, neither of them gave conscious heed to these glances.

"Not what you hope," replied Joyce promptly.

"What I hope?" echoed Helen.

"I'm not going to give up my husband—to you," said Joyce.

Then anger possessed her. This girl had disdained Larry, had estimated the attraction of fifty millions as greater than the attraction of Larry. That Helen had later discovered her mistake made no difference. That she could contemplate making it was enough to condemn her with Joyce.

What sort of a girl was this? What sort of people were these, anyway, among whom her lot had been so strangely cast? They held themselves, by virtue of their money, or by virtue of belonging to a class, not merely above the law, but above the rule of ethics. Ethics? Too high sounding a word. Substitute for it the word decency.

They weren't decent. Power had so inflamed their minds that they didn't even think reasonably. They swapped wives or husbands as their ancestors—whom now they disdained in favor of a lineage discovered for them, at so much an ancestor, by tongue-in-check practitioners of heraldry—had swapped horses. Holding themselves clear from technical infidelity sometimes—they prided themselves on a virtue that was only of the flesh and most certainly never of the spirit.

"Good Lord, you aren't going to argue it with me, are you?" she demanded.

"Why not?" Helen's voice held spirit. Joyce was surprised. She had estimated this girl as weak, and had not realized that even weakness has moments of strength.

"Why not?" She repeated the other's question. "Your fiancé comes to me, threatens me that he'll ruin Larry unless I keep him away from you—and now you casually prepare to debate with me about your rights in the man I married."

Helen's mouth twisted in a sneer.

"What are those rights?" she asked.

"Any court in the world would define them accurately for you," Joyce replied.

"Oh, a *court*." Again Helen sneered. "Of course, if a woman can hold a man only by the law——"

"Suppose I hold him by the very thing you'd use to take him from me?" cried Joyce. "Larry loves me," she added.

"When," inquired Helen, acidly, "did you discover that?"

"Immediately after," retorted Joyce, "you had kissed him."

Oh, it was vulgar, incredibly so, but—what other weapon was available.

"I suppose he told you that," asserted Helen.

"That he'd kissed you? Yes, he told me."

"And then told you that he—loved you?"

Joyce felt an unaccountable pity for the girl.

"Don't you think we'd better abandon this? It's—it's so degrading."

"Even degrading things have to be talked over, sometimes," said Helen. "I suppose it didn't occur to you that Larry knew that—well, that we'd been seen, and you might learn about—what we'd done?"

"Well?" Joyce's tone was dangerous.

"Larry is chivalrous. He might not want me—well, named in a divorce suit."

Joyce stared at her. The vanity—the vulgar vanity—no, she must be just. Even the meanest natures awaken to love, or that which passes for love in such natures. Helen Wilson, amazingly, was prepared to reject Burton and his colossal wealth, was prepared—it seemed—to go through the agonies of a divorce suit, to meet scandal and loss of reputation, for the sake of Larry.

Joyce felt suddenly sorry for her.

"My poor child," she said, "don't you see? Larry does care for me——"

"Even if he did—I don't believe it—you don't care for him. How could you? A woman who'd marry a total stranger——"

"Is so much worse than a woman who'd marry for money——"

"I haven't," Helen defended herself.

"Not yet," Joyce said. "But when you find that Larry is not for you——"

"I won't find that out," declared Helen.

"I'm afraid," said Joyce, "that you will."

"You mean to tell me that he—really loves you?"

"He has convinced me," laughed Joyce.

"Then—then you *are* his wife?"

Humor, that shrugging unwanted humor that arises from ugly situations, left Joyce now. She had tried to laugh and had succeeded, but the success was not real. What she really wanted to do was to scratch and scream and pull hair, and she was rather pleased with herself to find that she possessed such elementary emotions. And now she was on the point of yielding to them. That Burton should profess an intimate knowledge and that this girl should now dare to put an intimate question . . .

But she rose to her feet. Across a table sat Larry, doing his best to keep his eyes away from the two women, his ex-fiancée and his wife. He felt that everyone present was inwardly—or perhaps verbally—commenting on the tête-à tête. If Biarritz was ringing with gossip, ugly mean gossip now, what would it be ringing with later on to-day? A thousand speculations would be voiced as to what the two girls had talked about. Did Mrs. Tracy know, and did Miss Wilson know that she knew? What were they go-

ing to do about it? What would happen to him?

He almost exclaimed with gratitude as Joyce signaled him to come to her side. Now he thought he understood. Joyce was making it obvious that she didn't mind the presence in Biarritz of Helen. Most onlookers would assume that Joyce had heard gossip of last night's kiss. Therefore, they would go farther and assume that the kiss was merely an indiscreet but harmless tribute to friendship, and that Joyce looked upon it so. Joyce was saving Helen from great embarrassment. A damn good sport, this wife of his.

Then he was at their table. He greeted Helen, and only the two women could have been certain that his careless speech hid embarrassment.

"I wanted you, Larry," said Joyce.

He felt a premonition that in her suave tones lurked something which he might well dread. But he merely nodded.

"There seems to be a misconception in the mind of Miss Wilson," said Joyce.

Larry whitened. This was not Joyce, not the Joyce he had come to know and learned to love so recently. He could give his heart, perhaps, to a woman if his past were specters, and who might not always be truthful. But manner—this was imperative. He could not have fallen in love with a woman who would create a scene, not with a woman who would indulge in recrimination.

"A misconception?" he muttered.

"About last night—er—caress," went on Joyce coolly. "Larry, will you tell her, please, that you love me, and no one else?"

## CHAPTER XXIII

LARRY TRACY, like everyone else who has ever been born, was subject to occasional dreams in which he suffered a thousand embarrassments. In the Stone Age, our ancestors doubtless dreamed that a saber tooth had entered the cave and was about to devour them. But modern life has robbed us of the terrors of violence, save that legalized by War, and our dreams are no longer of wild beasts, but of appearing on the street without our pajamas.

He felt now that he was dreaming. Real waking life could not produce an embarrassment akin to this. Joyce hadn't said the words she had used; his ears had not heard them; Helen Wilson was not looking at him now, witnessing the agonizing blush that swept from Adam's apple to eyes.

Then, to assure him that he was not dreaming, but that he was actually suffering in the living flesh this agony, he heard his own voice make grave answer.

"Helen, I love Joyce."

There was a moment of dead stillness. Across the plaza a Moor, retailing shawls, argued violently with an Armenian who made a living in the same pursuit. A gull shrieked raucously. The clatter of the laughing voices at the near-by stables was a deafening roar.

Slowly Helen arose. She faced Larry. She held out her hand.

"Good-by," she said.

That was all. She didn't look at Joyce, dropped her eyes from the miserable expression on Larry's face. Then she was gone. Larry sat down. He faced Joyce.

"There may be," he ventured, "an explanation for this. I can't imagine one."

"You found it vulgar?" she gently queried.

"I find it incredible," he said. "I find it so dreadful—God knows," he blazed, "a man would *have* to love you to let you——"

"Get away with a thing like that?" she finished.

"I don't mind your humiliating me—but, in God's name, why humiliate Helen, deliberately?"

"Wasn't there deliberate humiliation for me in what she did last night?" Joyce countered.

"An impulse of a moment," he began.

She cut him short.

"It may have been the impulse of a moment, but it wasn't carried out for several weeks. She had time to think over that impulse on her way across the ocean, on her way down here from Paris."

"But revenge——"

"How do you know it was revenge?" she asked.

"What else was it?"

Oh, he was learning things about life and about himself. Women who were not "nice" could nevertheless be infinitely desirable, and desirable in ways that were not base. A man could love—aye, adore—where reason told him that here was something contemptible.

"Suppose," she made reply, "that I let you find out for yourself the answer to that question."

Billy Valdemagara joined them then, and further questioning was impossible. And when, after luncheon, they drove to Resaurie, something flinty, unyielding, in her attitude, forbade his referring to the scene at the Bar Basque.

The telephone was ringing as they entered the villa, and the butler was struggling with the message. Larry took the receiver. He handed it to Joyce.

"Someone wants you," he said.

Joyce took the telephone.

"Mrs. Tracy?"

"Yes."

"This is Frank Burton, Mrs. Tracy. Much obliged."

That was all. The receiver at the other end of the line clicked. Well, Joyce mused, Helen hadn't waited long. She had been convinced that Larry's avowal, forced from him by his wife, was not couched as it had been simply because he wished to protect his former fiancée from unpleasantness. Helen *knew* that Larry loved his wife, and therefore—if Joyce had any ability at all to read a situation correctly—she had gone to Burton and consented to marry him soon. That must be it.

And Larry—she grimaced at his unconscious back as he mounted the broad stairs—Larry thought she had humiliated Helen through mean spite, through petty jealousy. How dared he think that of her? How dared he think that his kisses mattered where they were bestowed? Perhaps, in this very moment, he was pluming himself that she, his wife, was jealous of his former sweetheart.

She repressed a desire to scream after him, to tell

him that she had forced his avowal to save him from financial ruin, and for no other reason on earth. It would lessen his conceit in himself. . . .

But she was to learn, within a very few minutes, that, so far as she was concerned, he had slight vanity. He knocked on the door of her room, grimacing to himself as he noted that the door was closed, not chummily ajar as had been its custom.

"Come in," she called.

He entered the room and stood very stiffly before her.

"Found a cable from my lawyers in my room," he said.

She was extremely conscious of her charming negligée. She knew, too, that the least provocative woman is at her best when she reclines in a chaise longue. Stuffy, conceited man; she'd make him suffer if she could.

"Why does a lawyer need other lawyers? Aren't you able to look after your own legal affairs?" she asked.

"I hope so," he said. "But—er—doctors don't treat themselves, you know. Besides, these are the lawyers of the estate. I'm not an investment shark. Leave it to Bellows and MacLane. Here's something for you."

He handed her a sheaf of imposing-looking documents.

"They look like papers in a separation suit," she said. And then she regretted the jeer.

"They make you—they're copies—you'll find that the originals have been deposited for you in the Cen-

tral and Northeastern—owner of half of whatever I have."

He turned as stiffly as he had entered the room, and started away. She looked after him.

"Larry," she called.

He halted.

"When did you do this?" she asked.

"Before we sailed," he answered.

"Why?" she asked.

"You're my wife," he said, as though that covered everything.

"But you—you didn't—care for me—then."

She hated the stumbling way she spoke.

"What did that have to do with it?" he demanded.

She digested this slowly.

"You mean," she finally faltered, "that—from the very start of our—marriage, you planned—"

"If a man," he smiled, and the smile was not pleasant, "deliberately makes a fool of himself, he might as well go the whole way, don't you think?"

The words, the intonation, the smile that was a sneer, struck through the armor of her pride and wounded her. Impulsively she started to rise, to hand him the documents which made her—good God, how rich did they make her?—and then she sank back on the chaise longue. Something remote in brain cells struggled to be articulate. Some warning dimly comprehended made her change her mind.

"How much is all this?" she asked.

He shrugged. "I'm not certain. It depends, you know, on market conditions. Sometimes it's more than others. On the average, though, there's about three million there. Mostly in American and in Inter-

national Rubber Consolidated. That's where the money was first made, so that's where I let it remain."

"All the eggs in one basket?" she commented.

"It's a very strong basket," he said.

"It doesn't sound sensible to me," she said.

Unaccountably his temper was awakened by the remark.

"Perhaps you'd like to change your investment," he said.

"Perhaps I would," she agreed. "Is—I don't know much about these things, but—is the price high now?"

"Higher than it's ever been," he answered.

"A good time to sell then, isn't it?" she inquired.

"Some people do look a gift horse in the mouth, don't they?" His voice was polite but his words and expression were not.

Nevertheless, she imperturbably went on.

"How could I sell them? What are they? Bonds?"

"There's a million in bonds, and a million and a half, par value, in stock. It's worth two million at the present market—"

"I want to sell the whole business," she interrupted.  
"Instantly."

He eyed her with a curious mixture of contempt and incredulity. She interpreted it as hostility.

"I may, mayn't I?" she asked.

"There are, to be sure, only matters of good taste involved," he said.

"What matters of good taste?" she inquired.

"Do I need to explain?" he parried.

"Perhaps you feel that if you explained you'd need to tell me that you hadn't really *given* me—what is it? The half of your fortune?"

"I've given it to you," he laconically assured her.

"But with strings tied to it," she charged.

"That isn't fair," he defended himself.

His expression changed to bewilderment.

"What do you want to buy in place of the Rubber?" he asked.

"If the Rubber belongs to me, why can't I do what I like without being asked questions?" she demanded.

He shrugged. "You know, sometimes people possess things, but guardians are appointed to correct their mistakes, to prevent them, to anticipate them."

"You mean, if they show themselves mentally incapable?"

"Yes," he said.

"But you could hardly have thought me mentally incompetent, or you'd not——"

"Do what you like," he cried.

Now he was definitely angered, but still there was more hurt than rage in his emotion. She would have liked to see him really enraged, swept by a passion that was purely wrath and compounded of no other essence. He might be—interesting—in such a mood. But just now she wanted a certain end.

"I hoped to," she replied coolly. "But—you'll have to help me."

"Help you make a fool of yourself?" he asked.

"That's rude, but—it would be returning what I did for you, wouldn't it? I helped you make a fool of yourself when I married you."

"It's gracious to remind me of it," he snapped.

"Rudeness for rudeness," she retorted. "Now—how do I sell the Rubber and buy government bonds?"

"You write——"

She interrupted with a headshake. "Writing takes too long. I want to cable."

"Look here, Joyce," he pleaded, "the stocks are yours. I can't take them back. They're *yours*. Exchanging them for something else won't make the something else any more yours than the Rubber is now. Why not let the stuff remain as it is—"

"Because I don't want to," she cut in. "Can't I wire the bank?"

He considered this. "Y-e-s," he reluctantly answered. "I'd have to wire old Bellows, too—"

"What for?"

"To confirm your order. Until you've met them, arranged a code with the Central, I'd need to confirm—"

She rose, provocative in her negligée but more provocative in her willfulness, and walked to a desk. She wrote out a cable and handed it to him. He read it.

"Will that do?"

He shrugged. "With my confirmation in Bellow's hands—yes, I guess so. But, Joyce, in God's name, why?"

"A gift," she told him, "is either that or it isn't. Now, my dear husband, unless you are willing to let me do as I will, I'll give you back your gift."

"You may do," he said savagely, "exactly as you wish."

He turned and was at the door when she stopped him.

"What was your cable from your lawyers?" she asked.

"Simply to notify me that the last of the transfers to you had been effected."

"Came opportunely. Imagine how I'd have felt if I'd had to wait before selling," she said.

"I wouldn't have told you. I didn't tell you until all legal formalities had been complied with," he said.  
"Is that all?"

"I think so," she said. "Oh, Larry." He wheeled once again at the door.

"Well?"

"I want to thank you," she said.

"Thank me? When you immediately sell what I've given you—oh, my God!"

He turned abruptly on his heel and went through the door. He did not slam it upon his exit, but he closed it with a firmness that spoke volumes. Her eyes were suspiciously bright as she looked after him.

No man had ever shown contempt for her before. Men had pleaded with her, had threatened, had become enraged. But none had ever shown contempt, because that was an attitude of mind which Joyce Carroll that was had never aroused in any man.

It had remained for marriage to bring to her a man who could feel that way toward her. Well, perhaps he would not continue to feel that way forever. Wasn't it only last night that he had kissed Helen Wilson? And wasn't it five minutes later—no more surely—that he had found himself really enamored of the woman who wore his name?

Her eyes and mouth showed no resentment. After all, he supposed that she was acting upon a whim. He had every right to suppose this. She might have disabused him by a sentence, but—and her face now

hardened a trifle—why explain anything? Perfect love required no explanations whatsoever.

Or was this really so? Wasn't it, perhaps, a poet's dream? Love could hardly be perfection, because people weren't perfect and nothing rose much higher than its source, save smoke, and smoke had no permanence.

No, love needed reassurance, so it must need explanations, needed them all the time. . . . Oh, well, she wasn't going to worry over his attitude. Let him worry over hers. She smiled mischievously, with full recognition of her own cruelty.

But restlessness possessed her. The after luncheon nap she'd planned, so necessary in the Biarritz sun, was no enticing prospect. She'd rather go to the Casino, do anything. . . . She knocked on Larry's door. She knocked again, then gently pushed it open. But he wasn't there.

The maid, summoned, had seen him go out. No, Monsieur had not said where he was going. So Joyce, piqued, though not realizing the fact, dressed. On the street before the villa she found a *fiacre*, and five minutes later she entered the gambling rooms.

She bought some chips and approached the so-called big game. A man, looking up, caught her eyes. It was Billy Valdemagara, and he had been, until that minute, in rapid, though whispered conversation with Miss Novel, the American woman who had been supporting Paul Weedon.

"There—her, there she is," cried the Novel woman stridently.

Joyce whitened. Her heart seemed physically to turn over in her bosom.

## CHAPTER XXIV

**V**ALDEMAGARA took command of the situation instantly. He was on his feet in a flash, was at Joyce's side, was guiding her from the room. But the Novel woman was not to be so easily denied. She too rose swiftly, and before the horrified Joyce could regain that self-control which had been banished at the woman's cry, she was confronted by a furious harridan.

The woman might have been good-looking, even handsome, once. Indeed, flushed with the first glass of wine, or the first winnings at *chemin de fer*, she had a certain coarse beauty still. But grief or rage or both had utterly eliminated all traces of whatever charm she may have been possessed of in the past.

Queer thoughts, born of strange unions of person and circumstances, were eternally popping into Joyce's mind. In moments that at the time of their being had seemed tragic, queer irrelevances had brought smiles to her lips; and at other moments, when comedy only was obvious, she had been saddened by the entrance of other irrelevances into her thoughts. At least, she had never deeply enough analyzed her mental processes to know that these seemingly disconnected vagaries of memory were really logical enough. For the mind never proceeds—granted sanity—save definitely, obviously, and logically. That we cannot always comprehend this merely argues how

little we understand our own brains. For the mind cannot cease functioning, and if one examines into its quirks, one finds that the conclusion reached apparently aimlessly was the result of a definite procedure.

So now, in this moment of terror, Joyce found herself wondering what those women looked like who derided and hissed and threatened Marie Antoinette in the long-ago French Revolution. A far cry from a vixen vulgarly accosting one in the "shimmy" room of a French Casino to the days of the Terror! But the sequence of thoughts was there. Joyce had never been menaced by one of her own sex before. She had read of women who struck and clawed, but she had connected them always with great upheavals in the historic past. Such women no longer existed, or, at least, ordinary folk never encountered them.

"You damned murdereress!"

The Novel woman's words brought her back to the menacing present.

Billy Valdemagara seized the woman by the arm.

"That's enough of this," he said. The face that Joyce had only seen gay now was hard, threatening.

"What do you mean, enough?" cried the Novel. "By God, you think that a few sweet words and a little money——"

"You said you'd keep your mouth shut," interrupted the Marquis.

He glanced around the room. The habitués were looking up from their play. The gorgeously uniformed attendants—three of them—were gathered by the door, and they were eying the participants in this scene with ill-concealed distaste. Gambling

houses, whether illicitly run or openly operated under governmental license, do not desire brawls. Immoralities must at least have good manners, which, by the way, is the commandment by which Society lives.

Their whispers resulted in indefinite actions: one of them took a few steps toward the trio of disputants.

"It wasn't a little money," said Valdemagara quietly. "It was enough to keep you the rest of your days."

"Yes, and why have you given it to me? That's what I want to know," cried the woman. "Why do you want me to keep my mouth shut? What's this —to you?"

Joyce's face whitened at the name he called her.

Valdemagara did not whiten. His ruddy face congested with blood.

"Miss Novel," he said, "I can have you deported. I *will* have you deported."

The indecisive attendant became emboldened. All play had ceased, and the French are a thrifty people. The percentage of the winning bets must never be forgotten by those employed by the Casino. Ten minutes of cessation of play might result in the loss of many thousands of francs.

"Monsieur le Marquis is being annoyed?" he asked politely. But the eyes which he turned upon Miss Novel were not polite. They blazed with threat. Did not courtesans know that they were permitted to ply their trade in the Casinos merely because light women encouraged gentlemen to play? Did they not know that gentlemen become wary of Casinos where vulgar disputes are permitted? And wasn't this

woman rather unsavorily mixed up in the death of Weedon?

Valdemagara turned to him. The color had left his face now, so quick was his self-command.

"The lady," he said gently, "has lost one dear to her. She is naturally upset."

He pressed a note into the man's hand. The attendant became quickly sympathetic.

"But certainly," he agreed. "Nevertheless," he went on, "if Madame would try for self-control——"

He shrugged, as one who would not censure, but who would call it to attention that a *chemin de fer* room was no place for the exhibition of grief other than regret for one's losses in a momentary way, he turned away.

"That," said Valdemagara, "is the last evasion, Miss Novel. One word from you, and I put your case in the hands of the police."

"We'll see about that," said the woman. "You don't believe what I've been telling you about this Mrs. Tracy. Well, why did she give me money the other day? Forty *milles*! Ask her to explain that, if I've been lying. And if it isn't true, why do you give me money?"

"One may stop a slander without believing in it," replied the Marquis.

"Yes, one *may*. But one doesn't go a couple of hundred *milles*," sneered the woman.

"Two hundred thousand francs," gasped Joyce.

The woman turned on her.

"Yes, that much. And if your sweetie will go that far, how much farther will your husband go?" Rage

suddenly swept over her. "But what do I want with money? By God, you killed Paul——"

Valdemagara raised his hand. An attendant started toward them.

"Mrs. Tracy," he said quietly, "it is better that such irresponsible charges be made public that they may the more quickly be disproved."

Intuitively Joyce knew that the Marquis was bluffing, and this intuition prevented her from protesting against the summoning of the attendant. But her face was marble as she waited for the accusation. It could, of course, not be proved, but the woman, in making one charge, would bring up other matters. . . .

Quietly Valdemagara spoke.

"I would advise you, Miss Novel, to plead a faintness. You want a sip of brandy? Otherwise, as God is my witness, you will be deported."

He greeted the anxious attendant.

"Madame feel faint. Some cognac. . . ."

The man hurried off. Miss Novel sank down upon a chair.

"Remember now," said the Marquis, "I have investigated you. I know—too much. My information will be placed in the hands of the French authorities if one more word is uttered by you, to anyone, about Mrs. Tracy. That will be all."

He turned to Joyce and a moment later she found herself, walking by his side, in the outer room. She now felt that faintness which the Marquis had ascribed to Miss Novel. Her companion remarked her pallor and they sat down. Valdemagara ordered tea.

"Please," she said, "tell me——"

"There is nothing to tell," he replied. "A coarse woman——"

"I want to know exactly what she said," she interrupted.

He shrugged, "Why, my dear Mrs. Tracy, pay heed to the utterances of such a person? She is, God pity her, a courtesan, sunk so low that she pays men for little kindnesses. What does it matter that such a woman mentions one?"

"It mattered two hundred thousand francs to you," she reminded him. "And, of course, I will repay you——"

"Can there ever be question of payment or repayment between us?" he asked.

She flashed him a glance that should have warned him, but only served to inspire him. Most men are apt to find it difficult to distinguish between gratitude and affection.

"Do you not know," he went on, "that to serve you must always be my desire?"

She ignored this.

"What did she tell you?" she insisted.

The waiter arrived with what passes for tea in France, and for a moment Joyce busied herself with the tea things. Her faintness was gone now, nevertheless she sipped the liquid gratefully.

The little bar in which they sat was deserted save for the bar man, and a waiter. Nevertheless Valdemagara kept his tones low.

"I beg of you, Mrs. Tracy——"

"And I insist, Billy," she said.

He sighed.

"There was a trifling matter of your residence in

New York, which the woman seemed to think might annoy you if made public——”

“It would,” said Joyce. “I paid her money not to mention it.”

“That,” said Billy gravely, “was a great mistake.”

Joyce nodded. “I knew that the moment I’d given her the money. Well, tell me. What did she say?”

“That was all,” replied the Marquis.

“But she explained the matter,” said Joyce.

“I have already forgotten it. I knew it was not true,” he countered.

“Then why pay her——”

He met her glance fairly. How long had they been acquainted? A matter of hours only, and this man, if she knew anything of sex, was a great beau, one who had come through the fires of a hundred flirtations unscathed. She was married to his friend, and she knew that friendship was no light thing to Billy Valdemagara, knew that honor was a mighty force in his life. Not easily would he let himself fail so far in friendship and in honor that he would fall in love with a friend’s wife. For she knew that, though Billy Valdemagara hid his secret from the whole world, he would nevertheless feel that he had done something unworthy even in hugging to his own bosom his illicit passion.

For it was this last that blazed from his eyes. This was, if she knew anything of men, the love of his life. Her thoughts drifted far . . . Marchioness de Valdemagara—or was it Marchesa? Castles in the Pyrenees. . . . United to a man whose veins held the blood of great hidalgos, who walked with royalty on not too inferior terms. . . . It was

a long distance from a small Maine town to the king's palace at Madrid. . . .

Then the look was gone from his eyes.

"Because sometimes the quickest way to stop a lie is to buy the liar," he answered.

"What did she say?" she persisted.

"She said—oh, my dear woman, what does it matter? If the calumny was so foul that I bought her silence, how can I repeat it to you?"

"And you're sure it's not true?" she asked. "Remember, I, too, bought, I thought, her silence."

"She lied," he said flatly.

He looked at her again. "She will talk no more," he promised. "Rage—in her way she loved this Weedon—and somehow—his death—it is known that Larry struck him—but she will conquer her rage. Life over here is so much more pleasant for one of her kind than it is in America. And those who have felt the fever of the gaming tables can never live without its heat. She will not ask for deportation. Don't worry about her any more, dear lady."

They had consumed their tea.

"You came to play?" he asked.

"I don't feel like it now," she replied. "But you——"

"No. I rarely play. I came down here to see this woman——"

He stopped, but she caught at his unwitting disclosure.

"Why? Had her talk been repeated so that you heard it?"

He shook his head. "After all, she was the only

one who could look after Weedon. And—well, the man was bad, but——”

“I understand,” she said. “Billy, you’re rather a nice person.”

“My dear,” he said, “that is exactly what I am not. I am—but you will never know, so—why expose myself?”

Now, for the first time, the Billy Valdemagara whom she had known shone through. His gay eyes twinkled, and his red hair seemed to move with each word and gesture.

“Our friend Burton and the little Wilson girl—you know that they left to-night?”

“When did you discover that?” she asked.

“She telephoned me half an hour ago to say good-by. I had asked them to Sunday’s bullfight at San Sebastián and they had accepted—her mother and Burton. It is just as well.”

Joyce made no response. Poor Helen. Again she felt pity for the girl, and this time its quality was not marred by vulgar hatred or contempt for her. She was going. Her eleventh hour attack, her pitiful grasp at happiness, was ended. Had she been brave enough to grasp it earlier . . . But it hadn’t required courage. She hadn’t been asked to share poverty with Larry. She was simply a greedy, scheming little cat, on whom any thought whatsoever, save mild regret that she could have a character sure to make her miserable, was wasted.

“We go to San Sebastián Sunday?” she idly asked.

“But you have already accepted my invitation,” he reminded her.

“But I thought that we could not leave France

until—the Weedon matter was disposed of," he said.

"It will be disposed of by to-morrow," he assured her.

"You mean that the police will find out——"

"They will decide that they can find out nothing," he interrupted. "At least, nothing that can seriously involve any of our friends. Men like Weedon make many enemies. Enemies, I mean, of the underworld. The police recognize this. A *cause célèbre* is possible only when highly placed persons are involved. But the Weedon affair, investigated, becomes so sordid. A jealous woman of the underworld . . . No, what was true this morning is not true this afternoon."

"But why? How can you be so sure?"

He laughed. "This is not Spain, but a Valdemagara has certain privileges, certain sources of information, even in France. After luncheon I went to call upon Monsieur le Prefect, and he was quite frank with me. The authorities have decided that the scandal would reflect no good upon the resort. Mind, the French police would not hesitate to follow a trail no matter how it mounted, to what high place it led them. But where it is a matter of a *macquereau* and, perhaps, an Apache, then that becomes different. And what else can it be? A man who lives on women. A man who makes much of a little caress, who, presumably, tries to extort blackmail——"

"But Miss Novel?" protested Joyce.

"Ah, she may suspect something—though what she suspects I cannot imagine. But she surely does not suspect you, despite her accusations. But your husband struck her man, so, revengefully, she denounced you—but that is ended. She knows that I can have

her sent from the country. Dismiss her from your memory, I beg."

"Still," said Joyce, "I would like to know what she told you of me. I insist, Billy."

"She said that you had been the mistress of a man in New York," he told her. "I can only say one thing to you, my dear. If you were not married to another man, I would, having heard this from the Novel, do myself the great honor to ask you to become my wife."

## CHAPTER XXV

THE dam—Joyce later on mused that it was not, after all, a very strongly erected edifice—that held back his emotions had suddenly burst. But the emotions of men were matters with which Joyce Tracy was eminently fitted to cope.

She smiled sweetly at him.

"The statement needs additions," she said. "You mean that if you happened to be in love with me—and if I were single—the woman's tale would have no effect upon your feelings."

"But of course." He took her cue instantly.

"Therefore, being married, and not being loved by you, your faith is doubly flattering," she went on.

"You are," he said, "not merely beautiful and charming and clever—you are kind," he said.

She knew what he meant. He was thanking her for ignoring his outburst, his confession.

"And you," she said, "are quite the sweetest man on earth, except Larry."

"One must always," he said slowly, "except Larry."

"Always," she said.

He smiled suddenly. "We shall lunch," he said, "on Sunday, at the top of a hill. Oh, a great hill, overlooking the town and harbor of San Sebastián. A glorious view. Then we shall proceed to the arena—His Majesty will be there, and the Queen, too. And you will see Porfrio, the matador from Portugal,

who kills the bull from the back of his horse. A horseman, and a horse! Such grace, such skill. . . . You have not seen Spain. Ah, Sevillia at Easter. You and Larry must visit me next spring."

"And I think," she laughed, "that you and I should visit Larry now."

"Where is he?" he asked.

"He had left the villa when I looked for him," she admitted. "Where would one search for a husband in this town?"

"A thousand places for most husbands, but for the husband of Joyce Tracy, one would look instinctively at his wife's side."

"Gracefully said, Billy," she chaffed. "But, failing there, where else?"

"We admit that he is not normal, if he is not with you every minute," he laughed, "but let us grant that he possesses traces of normality. Wherefore, we should find Jeanne Mazell, where all men who are not surrounding you must be."

"Wasn't there something said about tea with her?" asked Joyce.

"There was. Shall we go there?"

They found a carriage outside the Casino and drove up the long hill that led to the Mazell villa. They passed Resaurie and Joyce ordered the cabby to stop. Larry might have returned. . . .

He had, and the fit of justifiable ill temper which had sent him out into the town had vanished now.

"Among the perils and pitfalls of Europe, Joyce, did I mention my friend the Marquis de Valdemagara?"

Billy grinned. "And there has been talk of the

American peril,, my friend, and behold, it has been having tea with me. But I have returned her safely to you, although I have not come unscathed through the encounter myself."

"And where are you taking me now?" Larry asked.

"We had thought of calling on Jeanne," said Joyce.

The tea was gay, and Joyce noted that Valdemagara detached himself from her side upon their arrival, nor did he approach her again that afternoon. She pleaded weariness when Jeanne suggested a party that night, and Larry backed her up, so they dined at home. After dinner, over their coffee in the little room adjoining the salon, Larry approached a matter.

"Joyce," he said, "I did not ask Miss Novel anything about you. I intended to, but——"

"Why did you intend to?" she demanded.

"Because I knew that you had given her forty thousand francs that you said you had lost at shimmy," he replied.

"You knew that I had lied to you?"

He blushed painfully. "I did."

"Then why not ask her about it?"

"Because I couldn't. One may think of questioning strangers about one's wife, but one doesn't do it."

"And why," she asked, "are you telling me this?"

"Because I want to make myself look as well as possible with you," he answered. "Because, Joyce, I love you."

"I paid the woman money because she recognized me," said Joyce. "She would have told you that I had been the mistress of a man in New York."

He breathed heavily. "I'm glad I didn't ask her.

I—Joyce, I might have killed her if she'd said that."

"You wouldn't have believed it?"

"Good God, no," he cried.

"Then why did I give her money?" she asked.

He stared at her. "Joyce, are you trying to tell me that what she would have said—is true?"

"Suppose I said that it was?" she asked.

"Then I would say that you were out of your mind," he told her.

"You'd not believe it?"

"I couldn't," he cried.

"Thank you," she said.

He took the curt expression as a jeer.

"Joyce, please! If I—had a mean thought—why be contemptuous of me? You'll admit that I have some excuse."

"I do," she said. "And I'm not contemptuous, Larry. I—Larry, Burton and Wilsons are leaving to-night."

"Well?"

"I thought you'd want to know," she said.

"Why?" he demanded. "Joyce, are you going forever to hold it against me that——"

"You kissed Helen? Don't be absurd. Ladies that ask for kisses nearly always get them. And gentlemen who refuse them aren't very gallant. No, Larry, I'm not going to hold it against you. If you'll have it that way—it's forgotten."

He made no answer, staring at her, as though looking for some break in her defenses of which this concession was an indication.

"But there is someone else who may hold it against you, Larry."

"Helen?" he hazarded.

She hid the faintest twinkle of malice in her eyes.

"Naturally you'd think of that. A man's vanity! The picture of the inconsolable young woman who hoped for so much——"

"Don't, please," he begged.

A looker-on would have assured him that Joyce was never more attractive than when she indulged in sardonic jeering, but to him it was a phase that repelled. Perhaps it was because he unconsciously glimpsed strength in her, and a man must be more than infatuated before he really cares for strength in a woman. He must be selflessly in love, and that kind of love is not born in a week or a month or in a year.

"All right," she conceded. "I'm not very gentle, am I, Larry?"

He mumbled something to the effect that she was all right, and that she knew that he knew it, and she cut into the compliment.

"I'm thinking of Burton," she said.

"Burton? What about him?" he asked.

"He may not have relished Biarritz' merriment, or scandal, or whatever one may call it," she explained. "I hate to seem harping on the subject, but he's an elderly man, you know."

"Well?" He frankly did not understand her.

"Elderly men who have permitted themselves to make errors of falling in love with young girls are subject to jealousies that young men can barely understand," she explained.

"You mean that Burton——"

"Yes," she sighed. "I mean that Burton——"

"It's too silly. Anyway, he's leaving here to-night. So, even if he were angry, why—well, he'll be gone," he finished lamely.

She wanted to tell him of Burton's two threats, but some hardly understood reluctance prevented her. Burton had been bombastic in his threats, and probably when his jealousy had cooled, he would regret their utterance. If every idle word is repeated, life becomes a difficult thing. Now, perhaps Burton's words had not been idle, but certainly they had not been too well considered. In these days men do not seriously threaten another man's ruin because that other man has kissed an ex-fiancée. Furthermore, Burton had telephoned her to-day, and that brief speech which he had delivered to her could well be considered a withdrawal of his threat. Why bother Larry by telling him about it?

She was sorry that she had hinted at anything. After all, this husband of hers, whom she was taking a sort of sadistic pleasure in baiting, had been extraordinarily decent to her. A starving waif, he had made her his bride. . . .

"That's true enough. He'll be gone," she conceded. "And let us hope, forgotten," she added.

That night she left her door ajar, even called to him to come into her room, where she lay—still not unconscious of her desirability—on the *chaise longue*, and they talked, in a return of their first camaraderie, until well toward morning. And she was rewarded by such a small concession by the gayety in Larry's voice, by the light in his eyes. . . .

They might have been, so far as Biarritz could guess during the next day or so, an ordinarily devoted

honeymooning couple. They had tea on the Wreters' yacht at its moorings in the Adour at Bayonne, and afterwards, on the impulse of the moment, they sailed up the river and dined at a funny little restaurant at Urt. They golfed at Chiberts, and ate *hors d'oeuvres* at the Château Basque. And on Sunday they went to San Sebastián with the Marquis Valdemagara, and Joyce incurred the contempt of the Spaniards by violently denouncing the picadors and matadors and leaving after the first bull was killed.

"My dear Billy," she said to the protesting Valdemagara, "I can't help it. I think it's a gorgeous spectacle and I'd as soon watch babies killed. I don't like blood, and if I've hurt your feelings, I can only atone by inviting you to witness a prize fight with us in New York, and *you* can call it degrading."

"But it is," said Billy "To watch two men pummel each other—"

"Wait until your Basque champion, Paolino, wins a championship," she laughed, "and you'll think boxing a great sport. But I can't stand it, Billy, do you mind?"

He forgave her. He was so besotted with her by now that he could have forgiven her much more than an inability to care for his national sport.

Though he no longer paid her the assiduous devotion of his first meeting, Jeanne Mazell was not the only one who saw through his transparent devices and realized that Billy Valdemagara was, as they phrased it, "sunk at last."

"It was a good ship, Billy," Jeanne said to him on the way home to Biarritz after the bullfight, "but it couldn't float forever."

"I don't understand you," said the Marquis stiffly.

"Oh, yes, you do, my child," said the piquant blonde. "You know exactly what I mean. The good craft Valdemagara has been torpedoed by an American corsair—"

"Jeanne," said Billy, "you are my friend, and I adore you. But you will not speak of this again?"

Jeanne looked at him. Her gentle blue eyes were misty.

*"Billy, my friend!"*

She put her hand in his, and he lifted it to his lips.

"Does she know?" asked Jeanne, ignoring his wish that the subject be not reopened. Jeanne Mazell knew men.

"I—I fear she does," said Billy.

"You *fear* she does?" Jeanne smiled.

"I mean that," said Billy.

"But why? My poor dear infant, don't you know that no woman can be offended that a man loves her? She may not wish him to speak—although she will forgive a weakness that makes him tell her—but she wishes to *know*."

"I—I'm not sure that Mrs. Tracy would like to," said Billy.

"Oh, my God in Heaven," groaned Jeanne, "but you are besotted! Joyce Tracy—well, she's the nicest girl I've met in years, but—no nicer than I, Billy."

"No nicer than you, my Jeanne," agreed the Marquis.

"Nor more virtuous," said Jeanne.

"Nor more virtuous," said the Marquis.

"Yet even I," chuckled Jeanne, "while I find it de-

plorable that a man should care for me, for me who am devotion itself to my husband, still, realizing how tremendous was his temptation, I have even managed to forgive those who *screamed* about their love for me. Yes, Billy, Joyce will forgive you if she knows. Still, I wouldn't tell her."

"Heaven forbid. I'm fond of Larry," said the Marquis.

"Most men are, at first, of their loved one's husband," said Jeanne. "But—it would be a shame—she adores Larry, you know, and your friendship—"

"You think she does?" Valdemagara eyed her eagerly.

"Think so? I know so," said Jeanne.

"I—I wondered," said Billy.

Jeanne's lips grew prim. "Then cease wondering, my angel, for I assure you it is so."

"She has perhaps mentioned her passion for Larry," suggested the Marquis.

"Naturally not," retorted Jeanne. "She's a bride. Larry is a most attractive man—"

"But their acquaintance was so brief before their marriage—"

"You've known her less than a week and fallen head over heels in love with her," she reminded him.

"Men do that with women," he observed. "But—do women—with men?"

"Often enough. Look here, Billy, you aren't dreaming of—"

"I'm dreaming of nothing—but of Joyce," he confessed.

"I wouldn't care for you if you did an un-nice thing, my child," said Jeanne.

Involuntarily Valdemagara grinned. This petite little woman, hardly more than a child, reproving. . . . Then he saw how right she was.

"I won't, my Jeanne," he promised.

They had passed the border and were in the neighborhood of Bidart, where villas bloomed on every hillside. Plenty of people could have looked into the motor and witnessed what happened and gossip would have spread all over Biarritz.

For Jeanne Mazell leaned swiftly toward Billy and kissed him on the lips.

"There, you poor dear," she said.

He looked at her. "Jeanne, you blessed lamb——"

"I'll tell Jimmy in my letter to-night that I kissed you," she laughed.

"And I," he said, "will tell my God that you are the sweetest girl—oh, Jeanne, why must this happen to me? I—Jeanne, I would not boast, but after all, I am Valdemagara. There are girls, lovely, beautiful, well born, who would care for me. Fifty generations, Jeanne—I want sons to inherit what it has pleased God to transmit to me, and Jeanne—I shall never have them. Jeanne, I shall love no one but Joyce, and—oh, my God!"

Appalled, Jeanne stared at him. She formed a quick intention. Somehow or other she'd get the Tracys out of France. It might be most advisable.

## CHAPTER XXVI

**B**UT the kindly offices of Jeanne Mazell were not necessary. A letter came from America and, a couple of days after the bullfight, at which Joyce had not comported herself in a manner to win Spanish admiration, Larry entered his wife's bedroom. He had, of course, discreetly knocked, much to the concealed annoyance of the Basque maid. What a man, she remarked later to the butler, and the remark was not the first of disapproving wonderment. Faith, but these Americans were cold. . . . And perhaps not strangely so, for had not the chauffeur of the American Mr. Burton asked such frank questions, stating that his master would pay well for information? Man and wife? Brother and sister! Not even that. Cousins!

And if such marriages were not ordinary occurrences in that so strange land of America, why then should the chauffeur of Mr. Burton asked such disconcertingly intimate questions about the Tracys? Oh, well, why concern one's self about barbarians?

Joyce, quite unconscious of the maid's hidden disapproval, greeted Larry pleasantly.

"Having a bully time over here?" he asked.

"Why, yes," she replied.

"Hate to leave? I mean—we haven't seen so very much of Europe, and——"

"Why, anything you like," she interrupted.  
"What's wrong?"

He shrugged impatiently. "Nothing, really. Only  
—you've heard me speak of Aunt Martha?"

In their intimate talks, when they had chatted together of trivialities, Larry had discoursed at length about his connections. He had never, even by implication, hinted that he wanted Joyce to be as frank as himself, but, in order to avoid the appearance of reticence, she had encouraged him to ramble from cousin to cousin, uncle to uncle, in-law to in-law.

She remembered Aunt Martha very well. A fat, irascible, extremely well-to-do widow was the picture Larry had created. A woman of swift impulses, hot rages, and generous repents. She read the letter Larry handed her.

"MY DEAR NEPHEW: I think it's outrageous that any Tracy should so far forget himself as to marry secretly. If you can call a marriage that filled the tabloids for weeks a secret! But any escape from the Wilson cat was justifiable, I suppose. However, you owe it to your wife as well as to your family to make some sort of public appearance with your bride. The town is filled with gossip, none of which is kept from me by my loving friends. Your wife was everything that she should not have been, if rumor is to be believed, which it emphatically is not. I insist that you return from wherever you are—I'm sending this to your office—as soon as possible, that I may take your wife under my wing and introduce her properly. Unless—which

Heaven forbid—she's the sort of woman who doesn't want to meet anyone or know anyone. There are certain conveniences, Larry, which can be disregarded only by royalty or genius, and you belong to neither class, unfortunately. You will have children [Joyce winced at this] and the very worst possible thing that can be said about a child is that its mother was odd. Now, my dear rash young man, heed your devoted aunt and bring that young thing right along home. Love."

"Well?" said Joyce as she finished.

"I wouldn't take the note too seriously—although Aunt Martha is a good old sport and I'm fond of her, but—my office has been writing and cabling, too. After all, I am a lawyer and I have clients."

"Then let's catch the first boat," suggested Joyce.

His face, which had been clouded, lighted with relief.

"You mean it?"

"We can come abroad again, can't we?" she smiled.

"Whenever you like," he assured her. He made an elaborate pretense of nonchalance. "Of course, I've taken this place for the season. If you'd like to stay on——"

"Without you? Of course not," she said.

"I—was afraid that maybe——"

"Why did you take Resaurie for so long?" she asked. "You knew about your clients, didn't you? That they'd need you?"

He colored, then met her eyes bravely.

"I—felt like letting the whole business go hang. But meeting Helen—finding that I didn't—must I go on? Joyce, it seems that everything I do or say comes back to one thing: I love you. When I didn't love you—or didn't know I did—I couldn't face my friends. Now that I do——"

"When do we sail?" she interrupted him.

"I've been telephoning Paris. I can get rooms on the *Majestic* next Thursday. This is Monday——"

"We'll make it," she assured him.

They did. The servants were paid off, dismissed, there was one exciting day in Paris, then the train to Cherbourg and the embarkation. Everyone, Larry said, was going east at this time of year, so no one was bound west. Joyce hid a smile as he looked up from an examination of the passenger list. Larry was no snob, but he was of a certain class and that class rarely recognized that other people had any existence whatsoever.

A famous inventor was aboard ship. A famous poet was a fellow passenger. A distinguished surgeon, an actor-manager. . . . But "no one was sailing west." She began to look at her marriage in a light apart from emotional complications. Aunt Martha's letter came to remembrance. Could she play the part evidently mapped out for her? Could she be, possibly, the sort of wife that Aunt Martha's nephew should have married? Could she be a distinguished hostess, an ornament to that circle of which she knew so little but of which it was obvious that a Tracy should be a part?

But she had too much tact to intimate, even by a glance, that she found snobbery in Larry's attitude.

It wasn't snobbery. It was ignorance. Larry had been born among certain people, had played with them, gone to school with them, and finally very nearly married one of them. He just assumed that people who didn't belong to the correct clubs, go to the correct places, know the correct people, somehow or other didn't count in the scheme of things. He didn't realize that the scheme of the world's things was far greater than Park Avenue, and comprised a list of names quite too many to be crowded into the social register.

So she agreed with him that it would probably be a dull voyage, and that it was just as well, because, after all, he could devote the next five days to the study of various important documents that his office had mailed to him.

As for herself, she had met too many people in her few years to want to meet them for the sake of meeting them. She was well content to stroll the promenade deck for an hour a day, lunch and dine *a deux* in the restaurant on the upper deck, and spend twelve hours of the twenty-four in bed.

It was a dull trip, but she enjoyed it. Larry, if one got him away from the matter of his affections for herself, could chat entertainingly, and they recovered, in great measure that early intimacy, although Joyce knew that it could never be as it had been on their outward voyage, when love had not entered into the relations between them, and both were anxious to make a bizarre adventure become tolerable.

Aunt Martha, apprised by wireless of their expected arrival, met them at the pier. She was robust, dictatorial, a veritable gladiator.

"No use arguing with these damn customs men," she loudly declared. "Larry, you look after Joyce's things, and come to the house when you can. I'm taking Joyce home."

She did. With a wave of her muscular right arm she bowled over a newspaperman and upset a camera.

"Vulgar prying curiosity," she declared. "I suppose your marriage will all be raked up again—my dear, why on earth did you do it?"

They had escaped the reporters now and were in a taxi.

"You mean—marry Larry?" asked Joyce.

Mrs. Martha Walton inhaled luxuriously the smoke of a cigarette.

"What else could I mean, my child? And how did Larry ever get up enough steam to carry off a girl like you? Or did you carry him off? Not that I'd imagine so. Larry's a sweet boy, but he's a sweet boy if you get what I mean. Now you—there's nothing sweet about you. Oh, don't misunderstand me, my dear. You're adorable. But no one ever carried you off, and you'd never carry off a man like Larry. Brains—you've got them. Not swept off your feet, and I wish to remark they're cunning feet and where did you buy those shoes? The brute who makes my shoes simply won't learn— No, Larry's not the kind that a woman would go out of her mind about—"

"Why wouldn't she?" demanded Joyce tartly.

Mrs. Walton looked at her. She took Joyce's hand in her own two large palms and squeezed it.

"That's all right, my child. I simply wanted to know if you cared for Larry. Now that I know—"

Despite herself Joyce burst into laughter. Aunt Martha pecked her on the cheek.

"There, my dear. Not given to sentiment, but—wanted to know about you. So much talk, you know."

"What sort of talk?" inquired Joyce.

"Unpleasant. Talk always is. Don't bother to say nice things. No fun in saying them. Yes, they say you were Dargon's mistress and—oh, all sorts of things. Don't believe a word of it. But what I want to know is, how did Larry run across you and how did you snare him from that Wilson cat?"

Larry's kin were entitled to know the truth. At least, kindly old Aunt Martha was, and so Joyce told her everything.

The tale was only half told when they arrived at the house on East Thirty-eighth Street. Hogan, grinning with joy, admitted them. Yes, his niece was still here, and only too anxious to serve her mistress. Luncheon would be ready at once. . . .

"How can I eat?" whispered Aunt Martha. "You mean to say, my child, that you were *hungry*?"

"Starving," said Joyce calmly. But she looked about the dainty table where Hogan hovered, and it seemed to her that she was reciting some memorized lesson. Could it be that she, Mrs. Laurence Tracy, had been at her wits' end only—how long ago was it? Years, centuries?

"You poor dear," cried Mrs. Walton.

Then luncheon, and afterwards the continuation of the tale.

"I didn't think Larry had it in him. You know, my child, he *is* a bit of a stick."

"He is nothing of the sort," Joyce defended him.

"Well, I mean—he never was expelled from college—never gave his parents or guardians a bit of trouble—and to think—that cat, that Helen Wilson—did you know that she arrived yesterday?"

Joyce shook her head.

"Came on the *Paris*. Frank Burton, also. Impudent hussy. Came right to Biarritz, eh? Well, what happened there?"

But Joyce became vague from now on. She would not tell Aunt Martha of Larry's momentary defection. But Aunt Martha found great interest in the murder of Paul Weedon.

"Good family, too," she commented. "Knew his grandmother. Well, blood will tell, only you never can be sure what it will tell, can you? And this Billy Valdemagara—I want to know *all* about him. Was he in love with you?"

"Of course not," exclaimed Joyce.

"Then he was," said Mrs. Walton. "How did Larry like that?"

"I tell you he wasn't," insisted Joyce, "so naturally Larry——"

"And how long have you been in love with my nephew?"

"Now," said Joyce, "let's talk about you."

Aunt Martha smiled, and launched into an outline of the plans she had tentatively made for the introduction of Joyce into the circles in which she belonged. Larry's arrival interrupted this. He responded half-heartedly to Hogan's greetings.

"Customs too much for you?" asked his aunt.

He shook his head. He held up an afternoon paper.

"Rubber's down fifteen points," he said.

"Well, what of it?" asked his aunt. "It will come back, won't it?"

He shrugged. "I don't like it. The dividend was passed this morning. Meeting of the board. New officers elected. Frank Burton made chairman. Statement issued to press. Pessimistic. Oversupply. Retrenchment. If I get no dividends—" He turned to Joyce. "Lucky you sold."

"Sold what?" asked Aunt Martha.

"Larry gave me, oh, millions in stock and bonds of American and International Rubber Consolidated," Joyce told her. "I—I had a feeling—well, I sold it all by cable."

"A feeling?" Aunt Martha emphasized the words.

Joyce nodded. The elderly woman turned to her nephew.

"Frank Burton, eh? Engaged to Helen Wilson. I don't like it, Larry."

"Neither do I," he said.

"Still, when you own a stock outright—"

"If you own a stock outright," amended Larry.

He shrugged. "I—well, I thought that if Joyce foolishly got rid of her rubber—well, I felt certain it would go up—so—I cabled instructions to margin fifty thousand shares and put up my own stock as collateral—but Burton's a sound business man. He'll see to it that the company's stock doesn't drop too far."

"You're sure of that?" asked his aunt.

"Why should he want to depress the stock?" demanded her nephew.

His words were simple enough, but in his voice was apprehension.

"Did you see him when you were abroad? In Biarritz?"

"Of course," replied Larry. "Helen, too. Why?"

His aunt shrugged. "I don't know. Not important. Now—when will you children dine with me? To-morrow night?"

Larry looked at Joyce. She spoke.

"We'd love it," she said.

"Then it's settled. I thought you would and I've invited a dozen people. Well, it's good to see my nephew and even better to see his wife."

She kissed Joyce enthusiastically and departed.

"She told me some of the talk that's been going on," said Joyce.

"What sort of talk?" Larry asked.

"They've given a name to the—the man that's reported to—to have kept me," said Joyce. "Dargon, the theatrical manager."

"Well?" said Larry.

"It—makes it hard—I thought you'd want to know."

"I would—if you had any idea that Dargon is responsible for the story, I—I'd make him eat his words."

"I don't think he is," said Joyce. "But—even so—you'd not want scandal or—Larry, I paid that Novel woman because I didn't want your—pride hurt. But—stories like that—now that we're back in New York—they can't be stopped."

"What's the basis for them?" he asked.

Her cheeks whitened.

"You—dare—to ask me that?"

"If I believed there was any basis I'd not say anything, Joyce. I want to know how such a tale got started. I want to fix responsibility."

"And I don't want it fixed. It doesn't matter. But—I went to Dargon's country place. He wanted to read me a play. I was to have a leading rôle. Imagine! An unknown actress to play the lead. But—I didn't know any better. I thought such things happened. And—well, Dargon didn't want to read me a play. He wanted me to play a part in real life. So I came home. That's all."

## CHAPTER XXVII

**A**ND Dargon talked? Boasted about what he hadn't achieved?"

Joyce shook her head. "I don't think he's quite that low. But—I lived in a tenement on West Fifty-eighth Street. A man there—a sort of hanger-on about the theater. Named Rogan. He—had been stage door man, office boy—handy man—all sorts of things for Dargon. It was he who got me the introduction to Dargon. And he—he thought that, of course, Dargon had succeeded, and—well, he brought other men—himself—I fled from the place—must I go on?

He shook his head. "I don't want to hear anything of it. I—don't need to tell you, Joyce, that I *know* you and—if I could just punch Dargon's head?"

He spoke like a small boy asking for an extra piece of pie, and Joyce smiled as she shook her head. Opportunity was knocking upon Larry's door that very minute but he was deaf. He changed the distasteful subject.

"Wonder what's got into Burton?" he murmured.

"I reminded you that he was an elderly man with a young fiancée," said Joyce.

He cast a quick glance at her.

"Do you mean to say you think——"

"He threatened, that night at the Reserve, that

unless Helen learned definitely that—that you didn't care for her—he'd ruin you."

Larry's jaw dropped.

"You don't mean to say——"

"I do," said Joyce.

"But you didn't tell me?"

She sighed. "Larry, it all seemed so preposterous——"

"Was that why you made me—I mean—you asked me to tell Helen that—that I loved you?"

"It was not the vulgar vanity it seemed," she replied.

"It's incredible," he muttered.

"Nothing's incredible when an old man loves a young girl," she retorted. "But—after that—with Helen—Mr. Burton telephoned. Simply to say 'thank you,' but I knew what he meant. Oh, Larry, how can people be so dreadful? He—he'd pried—I don't know how—knew that we—don't live together——"

"I'll forget Dargon and take care of Burton," said Larry, grimly. Then his brows drew nearer together. "But if he telephoned you—I mean, Joyce, it's an unbelievable jealousy. To depress a stock——"

"Helen cared for you," suggested Joyce.

He stared. "What do you mean?"

"He's out of his mind about her. He'd have to be, to take her, to let her take him, down to Biarritz, where you were. . . . I wonder if she——"

"You mean that he's attacked Rubber to please her?"

"It does sound ridiculous, doesn't it?" admitted Joyce. "And it's rather low of me to intimate that

she might be capable of such a thing. But—Larry, she hates me. And—she can't care much for you—now."

He whistled softly. "I hope to God you're wrong, my dear. Another day like to-day, and I'm ruined."

"But why? You own your stock——"

"But I pledged my own stock to buy fifty thousand more shares. I borrowed a million, in other words. My office manager met me on the pier. My brokers want more margin, more security, Joyce. A drop of fifteen more points would completely wipe me out."

"I have two million dollars," she reminded him.

"Which is yours," he said.

"And what is mine is yours, isn't it?" she asked.

He shook his head. "I couldn't take it back, Joyce."

"Why not?"

"Let's not argue it, my dear," he said. "I can't, and that settles it."

She withdrew from the argument. And immediately thereafter he left the house, bound, she surmised, for his brokers. They dined alone that evening, and Larry was distract. Later, over coffee, he managed a smile.

"Sort of wanted to prove how wrong you were to sell the Rubber," he confessed. "Stubborn. Serves me right."

"What do your brokers say?" she asked.

"Say that Burton can depress the stock down to fifty. It'll go below a hundred to-morrow. They advise me to get out the first thing in the morning. It'll cost me over a million, they think, and—Joyce, I hate to be beaten—by him."

She knew what he meant, and, strangely, her knowledge brought her no rancor. That her husband should hate to be beaten by a man who had beaten him in a love affair aroused no jealousy in her. She was one of those rare women who cannot be jealous of what no longer exists. For, oddly, most of the jealousies of married couples are over persons who have ceased to matter. A woman can easier forgive a present than a past mistress.

They retired early, each to the room that had been occupied before their trip to Europe, and shortly after Hogan had refused admittance to the fourth enterprising reporter.

"It doesn't make any difference, though," said Larry, grimly. "The tabloids will have more to print than if their reporters had actually interviewed us."

He was right. Aunt Martha telephoned shortly after Larry had departed for his office the following morning, and she was filled with the tabloids.

"Why a man can't get himself decently married without a lot of interfering busybodies—and speculating as to how *I'll* receive you, now that you've returned to America. . . . They even telephoned me, but I refused to answer. My child, will you lunch with me? Good. The Colony at a quarter to two."

In the reception room of the restaurant Aunt Martha was waiting, and little as Joyce knew of the people amid whom Larry's way was fixed, she had read the newspapers, and realized that, informal though the luncheon was, Larry's aunt had made it a matter of prime importance. Mrs. Vanderfield, Mrs. Purlgrim, Mrs. Masterman, the acid spinster Miss Griffen—these and three others represented what the

society reporters would to-morrow call the smartest group in the restaurant. And they were all, even the acid spinster, gracious, willing to be pleased and graciously willing to please.

"You're a success, my child," said Aunt Martha after the guests had departed. "Imagine, at this season of the year, getting a group like that together for anyone less than the Prince of Wales' fiancée. I assure you, my child, that this will do more to stop idle gossip——"

"Why bother to stop it?" asked Joyce.

Aunt Martha frowned. "For Larry's sake, my child. Cæsar's wife, you know. That's all. Tell me, where is that young man to-day?"

"Office—or brokers," replied Joyce.

"What's he doing with brokers? Never knew him to speculate."

Joyce, bidden thereto by an impulse founded upon Aunt Martha's sure sympathy, told the tale of Burton's threats. Aunt Martha listened earnestly. At the conclusion of the story, she stopped short on the Avenue.

"Come in here," she said suddenly.

"Here" was a brokerage office, and Joyce, who had no knowledge of such matters, was surprised at the eager deference shown Mrs. Walton.

"How did Rubber close?" asked Aunt Martha.

The deferential spruce young man who had set out chairs for them answered without hesitation.

"Eighty-three and a fourth," he said.

Aunt Martha made a sound that in another woman, a woman less austere reared, would have been called a smacking of the lips.

She turned to Joyce. "Larry's brokers said that Burton could send it down to fifty, eh?"

Joyce nodded. Aunt Martha grinned capaciously.

"Well, that shows how much brokers know." She addressed the young clerk. "Keep your mouth shut, I suppose. I know perfectly well you can't, but—well, Hodges and Brickley won't keep my account if this leaks out. I want you to buy me a thousand shares of Rubber at eighty-three and a thousand more every point down. At seventy I want you to buy me two thousand a point, and if it gets to sixty I want five thousand a point."

She turned to Joyce. "Frank Burton, eh? Get gay with my nephew, will he? *Parvenu!* Upstart! He'd better read up on the financial history of the early nineteen hundreds. He may discover that Thomas Walton used to do as his wife advised when it came to the market."

"What do you mean?" asked Joyce, when they were out on the sidewalk.

"It means," chuckled Aunt Martha, "that I stand to lose a million or so or make twice as much. Rubber can't go down to *stay*. It's against all economy. Frank Burton can force it down for a day or so, but —it will rebound higher than where it was. And I'm going to buy all the old idiot offers to sell. And first thing you know he'll be looking for stock to give to me. Abuse his position as chairman of the board, eh? I'll put some feeling of duty into the old rascal. I happen to know that he's pretty well spread out just now. He can't do monkeyshines with Rubber without losing on a lot of other things, and how that man hates to lose."

She eyed Joyce severely. "Don't tell Larry. Teach him a lesson. After it's all over I'll set him up——"

"Couldn't you transfer that business to me? Let me do it with my money?" Joyce was eager.

"You might lose. Nothing certain in this world," rumbled Aunt Martha. "Let you have half of it, though. Good joke on Larry, too. . . . To-night at eight-thirty. Bye-bye, my dear."

What a strange feeling of importance it gave one to deal in millions. Here she was, unable to visualize much more than a thousand dollars, the possessor of a fortune, a fortune which she had never seen, whose existence had been made manifest to her only by the sight of a few pieces of paper, and yet she was gambling for additional millions. . . .

But to restore Larry's losses . . . To have him know that she could intrigue, conspire and plot behind his back, for his benefit . . .

The dinner passed off triumphantly. Two of the women who had attended the luncheon were also to dinner, and the unfeigned cordiality of their reception of her proved that Joyce's charm had not been unavailing earlier in the day. Even the most austere-seeming melted for her. It was partly the fresh beauty of her, but Aunt Martha's position and undisputed millions had their due share in the affair. She had sense enough to appreciate that little matter, and the further sense not to be jealous that another's influence had aided in the accomplishment of things not completely amenable to her own indisputable charm.

"There hasn't been a Tracy born since young Larry," whispered Miss Griffen to Aunt Martha.

"It *does* seem time to remedy that matter," chuckled Aunt Martha.

Now Joyce had been looking forward to something of drama upon her return, but life became commonplace. She read the papers about Rubber, and she knew that Larry was increasingly worried. She knew, finally, that he had gone broke, as Aunt Martha termed it.

"Burton squeezed him right down to the last shilling," chuckled Aunt Martha, a few days after the visit to the brokerage office. "But meantime, though my dear Frank doesn't know it, I've squeezed him. Rubber's at fifty-five. St. Peter couldn't drive it lower. Now watch it hike!"

It did hike. In a day three weeks after their arrival in New York, Aunt Martha sent for Joyce. Burton was with the fat old lady, and Burton was not the threatening man he had been in Biarritz.

"Been a bit too much for me, eh, Mrs. Tracy?" he greeted her. "Man makes a bad mistake when he gives warning."

"But you didn't," said Joyce. "At least, I didn't believe—"

"Didn't intend to," said Burton. "You did your part all right. But Helen—no use beating around the bush. I'm overextended, as Mrs. Walton very shrewdly seems to have discovered—"

"My business to know all about these things," boomed Aunt Martha's big voice. "Woman can't be left sixty millions without finding out a few things, especially if she's helped her husband make the money. Well, Joyce, Mr. Burton's finding it difficult to get hold of stock to deliver to us. Rubber went back to

one thirty-four to-day. He'd like to settle a bit under the market."

"Whatever you say, Aunt Martha," said Joyce faintly. She was bewildered by it all, wasn't fully aware of all that had been going on. She only knew that she'd written a check for one million dollars and given it to Aunt Martha. . . . And here was Burton giving her his check for two millions. . . .

She showed it to Larry that night after dinner. He had just been rather shamefacedly telling her that their mode of living must be scaled down.

"Why?" she asked.

"I wasn't wise enough to take my losses. I tried to protect myself—and well, instead of a million I lost more than two," he said.

"But, we can keep going as we have been on the money you gave me," she said.

"That is, of course, out of the question," he answered.

"I never heard anything so silly," she told him. "A husband can give his wife half his fortune and then he can't accept it back from her." She made a grimace. "I want to know why not."

"Because," he said, "you don't happen to be in love with me."

"May I ask," she inquired with a solemnity whose mockery he did not prove, "what that has to do with it?"

"One can accept sacrifices from a person who loves one, that can't be accepted where there is no love," he told her.

"Then I shouldn't have accepted the money from

you, because when you had it made over to me you didn't care for me," she reminded him.

"I did care for you. Joyce, you know I did. I must have cared for you the first moment I saw you. We don't know—we can't ever tell when love comes—but it seems to me that I always loved you, never cared for anyone else——"

"If you loved me, really loved me, you'd not be so proud," she said. "It seems so silly—Larry, I'd be dead now, but for you. *Starved* to death. And you—you won't let me repay you—it would never have happened had I told you what Burton said in Biarritz. It was selfish of me. I was warned, sold out—and didn't warn you. Larry, you make me feel cheap, unworthy, mean, *dishonest*."

"There was nothing mean or dishonest in withholding idle threats from me," he said.

"But they weren't idle, were they? Burton did it, and—Larry, unless you take—unless you let me replace what you lost—Larry, I can't live with you any longer."

"Now that," he said, provoked, "it quite the silliest reason for a separation I ever heard of."

"One reason is as good as another," she said. "I—you're selfish. You just want to be—oh, the god in the machine. You want to be important, want to be condescending. Why," she went on in a rage that she didn't comprehend, "that's why you married me. It wasn't because I was attractive, or even because you pitied me. It was because—no, it wasn't even because you wanted to hurt Helen. It was because you fancied yourself being magnanimous, gracious, tremendously generous. This poor girl. I'll give her my name, my

fortune—the picture of yourself, not the picture of me. That's what it was. You gave me half your fortune because you liked the picture of yourself enriching the poor miserable girl whom you had rescued from starvation. That's the reason, the only reason, and—if you knew how I hated you!"

He could only stare at her, miserably, unhappily, acutely aware that there was more than a generous share of justice in her accusations.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

THEIR scale of living was not cut down, although Larry did not accept from Joyce the fortune that she had acquired through the acumen of Aunt Martha. But that elderly widow sent for her nephew.

"Jackass," she greeted him.

He grinned at her.

"Dutiful nephew accepts rebuke from doting auntie," he said.

"Don't want to be an aunt. Always wanted to be a mother, then a grandmother. Nature decided otherwise. Want to be a grandaunt."

"Did you send for me to tell me about your stifled grandmaternal wishes?" he asked.

"Like to spank you," she said. "Impertinent young puppy. Wanted you to know I made my will."

"When?" he asked.

"Day or so after I met Joyce."

"Yes?" He was polite.

"Always named you as residuary legatee. Matter of forty millions, my lad."

"Awfully good of you, Aunt Martha," he murmured.

"What you trying to be—well bred? No enthusiasm, eh? Well, how do you like it when I tell you that I've changed my will? That ought to bring some strong expression from you, eh?"

He smiled. "You old darling," he said. "You know perfectly well that if you leave me a cent or a million, it won't make the slightest difference in my regard for you."

The old grenadier eyed him mistily. "Almost make me believe in the innate decency of human nature once more," she said. "Larry, you're the best sport I ever knew. You lose your fiancée, and you marry a girl for whom you don't care a tinker's damn, and you make the best of it——"

"Better stop there, Aunt Martha," he said quietly.

"Don't warn your aunt," she advised. "Started something, got to finish it. What I mean—lots of men, regretting an impulse, a silly stupid impulse, would get out of it as best they could. But you—you're a gentleman as well as a good sport, Larry. You stick right by that girl——"

"That girl!" he reminded her, "is Mrs. Laurence Tracy."

His aunt shrugged. "So the tabloids inform me. Nice enough little thing, too. But, of course, not the sort of person a Tracy would marry."

"Will you be good enough, Aunt Martha," he said softly, "to cut me completely out of your will?"

He was at the door before her bulky form, strangely quick, could interpose itself before his departure. She seized him in two capacious hands and shook him gently.

"Larry, my own nephew! Did you think that your old aunt was being—fresh—for the fun of it?"

"I don't want to think," he replied, angrily.

"Larry, Larry," she reproached him. "I—was

clumsy. I—wanted to find out—I've left half my estate to Joyce, and——”

He kissed her suddenly, vehemently. The concern left her eyes, and they sparkled with gayety.

“On condition,” she added, “that you two have a child.” She looked away from him. “Otherwise,” she went on swiftly, “she gets one-fourth——”

“You're the most generous soul on earth,” he said. But his tone lacked the enthusiasm of a moment ago.

She ventured to look at him again. “Meantime—hate to feel that anyone, even the tenderest of nephews, is looking too far ahead. I've transferred ten million to you now. Don't like to think that a nephew of mine is dependent on his wife—know all about the Rubber business—all about your refusing to take back from Joyce what you gave her——” She applied a handkerchief to her nose. “Always intended to give it to you before I died, but put it off, waiting for you to get married. Well, you've got married. Next duty is to become a father.”

Embarrassedly, Larry looked at her.

“Aunt Martha, if you're giving me money because—oh, damn it—Aunt Martha—Joyce and I aren't—we won't have any children.”

He looked away, crimson with an embarrassment that he could not hide. The great form before him was strangely silent. So silent, in fact, that he finally turned back to look at her. What he saw alarmed him. Aunt Martha was in the throes of an agony inexplicable. Her face was red, purple, and veins showed. . . .

He grasped her hands. Then he relinquished them. For his aunt was laughing, laughing, he felt, almost

ghoulishly, certainly more vulgarly than he had ever known her to laugh before.

"Larry, my poor blind infant, you'll be the death of me," she gasped. "Get out of here, dear boy. I'm in a mood when no Tracy could possibly approve of me. I—I feel as Gargantuan as I fear I look, my child. I want to give way to a Rabelaisian mirth——"

He left her, made an uncompromisingly stiff departure which he felt was strangely lacking in dignity.

What the devil was Aunt Martha driving at? Of course, there was the obvious thing. She was insinuating that Joyce cared for him. It was more than insinuation; it was almost a direct statement.

But how could Aunt Martha know anything of Joyce's inner feelings? He would have wagered his soul that Aunt Martha was not the recipient of Joyce's confidences. There were some things that Joyce would divulge to no one on earth. If Joyce loved her husband, her husband would be the first to be told of that glorious, earth-shaking fact. . . .

But, on the other hand, women, according to all his reading, had an uncanny intuition about other women. Women seemed to *sense* the emotional attitudes of other women. . . .

His heart became a living bounding thing, an imprisoned thing that sought escape from its narrow cell. He felt an impulse to run. Aunt Martha was not merely the sweetest old soul that ever breathed and the most generous, but she was also the wisest and most knowing. Nor was there any vulgar impertinence about her. She sometimes chaffed the Tracys for their adherence to outworn forms, but she was healthy, not vulgar. She would not be guilty of pry-

ing impertinence. She hadn't been "pumping" Larry. She had spoken only from the kindest of impulses.

Something else. Joyce might find it difficult to tell Larry that she cared. It might be that, after all, despite Joyce's reserve, that she had taken a confidant, in order that that confidant . . . Oh, well, he would go home, find out—

Speed, Speed! That was what he wanted. But his beating heart forbade a taxi. His beating heart demanded physical movement, ordered him to walk. . . .

He didn't ring at the door of the Thirty-eighth Street house. He let himself in with his own key. He didn't want Hogan to witness the expression that he knew illumined his face. That was for Joyce alone to see.

He paused inside the hall. Suppose that his aunt were utterly wrong. Depression seized him and his heart slowed down. Of course his aunt was wrong. If Joyce cared . . .

Soon, if he continued telling her that he loved her, she'd weary of the telling. They had agreed to certain things. What matter that the agreement was unendurable to him? He had entered into it, and if he tried to violate it, pleaded for a return of that love which lavishly he had bestowed upon her, then she might end even that farce which brought him so much happiness.

He encompassed, in his imagination, a Joyce-less existence. It couldn't be borne! Better to be eternally tantalized by this sweet presence than to have the presence withdrawn. And Joyce, convinced that he was not prepared to abide by their argument, might well leave him. She had been, he felt, near to summary

ending of their matrimonial farce in Biarritz. That night when he had kissed Helen, he had been, he believed, near to losing her.

But against the warnings of his inner spirit were the words of Aunt Martha. He heard the low murmur of Joyce's voice. It came from the living room. Slowly he put away his hat and stick. Involuntarily he glanced in the mirror.

What he saw gave him little encouragement. After all, women were like men. The only reason so many homely men got married was because of the dearth of handsome men. What was there about him that could win a girl's whole-hearted love? Especially the whole-hearted love of a girl so exquisitely beautiful as Joyce?

Why, he'd even shown himself lacking in ordinary business sagacity. Her woman's intuition had made her save the fortune he'd given her, while his stubbornness had made him lose what he had retained for himself. He forgot, in his contemptuous appraisal of himself, that Joyce had had more than mere intuition to guide her in her sale of Rubber.

Dependent on the generosity of a rich aunt! Was there anything more pitiful than a man who inherited money and could not keep that which had been given to him? Why, suppose that he was absolutely penniless. . . . Pride returned to him. At least, though unfitted for speculation, he was a good lawyer. Only this morning Sanderley and Snaffin, the biggest corporation firm in New York, had invited him to become a junior member of the firm. And they had not been inspired to the offer by his wealthy connections. They had been badly beaten in a case which they might very well have won, and Larry had been the opposing coun-

sel. No, he could make money, could live extremely well quite independently of rich aunts.

But what did all this depreciation and depreciation's obverse lead to? Women didn't give their love because of what a man was or because of his possessions. They gave it—God alone knew why. Why did he love Joyce? Was it because she had a beautiful face and a lovely, gracious body?

How little, after all, these had to do with his love for her! But if not these, what? Was it the character, the lovely spirit that shone through her eyes, was audible in her voice?

Once again, God alone knew why. For love is one of the few emotions that is difficult of analysis. It can be reduced to a formula easily enough, but beyond that formula lies something . . .

He walked quietly to the door of the living room, hesitated a moment to compose himself, and then entered the room. There, holding Joyce's hand in his, leaning over her with an eagerness that could mean only one thing, was Billy Valdemagara. He was speaking and, without distinguishing one word, Larry knew what the Marquis was saying.

He was making love, love of the most violent kind, and was making it to the wife of one of his best friends. It was that very fact that caused Larry to withdraw on tiptoe from the room. An emotion that would make Billy Valdemagara forget loyalty was an emotion not to be intruded upon. It was his own wife, Joyce Tracy, who sat there, receiving the adoration of another man. Yet Larry Tracy slipped from the room.

Not upon Joyce would he inflict the indignity of an

interruption. Had here been a love that had ever been confessed, not a love only hinted at by an outsider, he might have acted differently. But, despite his Aunt Martha, he knew nothing of his wife's feelings for himself. He would not degrade himself by acting like a spy. She had not betrayed him, because there existed between them nothing that was capable of betrayal. Theirs had been a marriage of convenience; nothing of the spirit had entered into it. If Valdemagara loved her, and she loved Valdemagara, there was nothing but a legal formality to be dissolved before those two could possess each other.

And Larry Tracy, God pity him, would not stand in their way. If Joyce wanted to be free . . . If he could only find some rage, something of that murderous frenzy which impelled deceived husbands to slay . . . But he had not been deceived. Joyce was offering to Valdemagara nothing that he, Larry, had ever owned. Body and soul she was free, except for the pitiful ties of a civil ceremony, ties that could be broken almost at will.

Well, Billy was the most charming man in the world —a man of position, wealth, scrupulous honor. . . . Even in this moment of abysmal despair, Larry could not find it in his heart to condemn Valdemagara. Any man might find it difficult to retain his honor when confronted with Joyce.

At the front door he paused, opened it, then slammed it. He walked quietly down the hall again. This time, as he entered the living room, the couple had separated.

"Why, Billy," cried Larry. He flattered himself that no one could possibly read into his tones anything

but cordial surprise at the arrival of an unexpected and welcome visitor.

Valdemagara leaped to his feet. His ruddy face was white, so that the freckles upon it seemed blemishes.

"Larry," he said.

His voice was dull, flat, expressing audibly the misery written upon his countenance.

"When did you arrive, Billy?" asked Larry.

He glanced at Joyce. Her lips were slightly parted, and in her eyes was an expression the nature of which he could not determine, except that he found no apprehension there.

"This morning. Came right up here as soon as the customs people were through with me," replied Billy.

"Sudden trip?" Larry found his voice as flat as Billy's.

"Rather," said the Marquis. He looked down at his hands, then suddenly up at Larry's face.

"Larry, I've been asking Joyce to run away with me."

"Yes?" Larry heard himself uttering the mono-syllable, yet not believing that it was his own voice he heard.

"I came to America with one object, to persuade your wife to leave you, to acquire a divorce, and to marry me," said the Marquis.

Larry nodded quietly. What ought he to do? Should he strike Valdemagara? But Billy was his friend. Billy—there was nothing wrong with Billy Valdemagara. As decent, white, fine . . .

"And you, Joyce?" he heard himself ask.

"You know the answer to that, Larry," said Billy.

"I—there isn't much to say. Only—Joyce told me that I must tell you. She said that—she couldn't, and—Joyce wants me to be her friend," he said.

"Naturally," said Larry quietly.

"And she couldn't be my friend if—if she had to tell her husband—what—what I had done," went on the Marquis.

Larry nodded.

"I—don't want to be melodramatic, Larry. But—I couldn't help it."

"You'd say that, of course," said Larry.

"What do you mean by that?" The Marquis' face was flaming red now.

"What I said," retorted Larry. "You could help it; you needn't have come here at all. But you say you can't help it because—well, I hope because you want to be my friend, too. And because you know that if you admit to a deliberate attempt to wrong me, that that friendship is forfeited. So, Billy, we'll say no more about it, eh? You say you couldn't help it; I know better, but—of course," and his voice, despite the whimsical phrasing, held a hint of menace, "if you want melodrama——"

Valdemagara rose to his feet. "Before God," he cried, "if you were enraged—if you were scoffing—if you were anything but honest—I could not face you. Larry, you—know I'm a cad, and yet—it is all right, eh?"

"Billy," said Larry gently, "it's all right."

## CHAPTER XXIX

V ALDEMAGARA had gone. He had gone without awkwardness, and Joyce found it difficult not to admire the Spaniard as much as she did her husband. If ever there had been an impossible situation to meet, these two men had met that situation. He had accepted an invitation to dine the following evening.

"But he won't be here," said Joyce.

Larry shook his head. "No—poor devil. We'll get a wire saying that he's been called away. . . . I'm sorry."

"So am I," said Joyce.

Larry shrugged. "I don't think you could help it, Joyce."

"That's generous of you, Larry. But, of course, you know that I could."

"Could you?" Again his voice was flat.

"Of course. A woman can't help a man loving her, but she can prevent his telling her."

Larry lighted a cigarette, taking more time over the process than was necessary.

"Then—why didn't you prevent him, Joyce?"

"Because there was only one way—to let him know, definitely, that there was no hope. That sounds so conceited," she added.

Larry liked her blush.

"And you let him know?"

She nodded.

"How?"

"I told him that I was in love with you," she laughed.

Her laugh robbed the words of any gravity.

"He might have suspected that, mightn't he?" he asked.

"You mean—because we are bride and groom? But the Helen affair . . ."

"Of course," said Larry. "That damn thing," he cried, "will come up between us——"

"I'm sorry," she said. "But—you wanted to know why he didn't assume we were in love. He killed Weedon," she added.

The final words were spoken almost casually, in a voice so unconcerned that Larry for a moment could not credit his ears.

"Killed Weedon?" he finally gasped.

Joyce nodded.

"He told you so?" Larry was still incredulous.

"Yes. But I think I knew it all along," said Joyce.

"But why——"

She shook her head. "I don't know why I knew it. Perhaps I didn't. Perhaps I just imagine, now, knowing, that I knew before. But—he did it. Weedon—spoke to Billy—after Billy had struck him for telling about you and Helen. And Weedon said that Miss Novel had told him things about me—and Billy struck him again. He killed him."

"Good God," gasped Larry.

Joyce shrugged. "I can't feel badly about it. Not because the man tried to injure me, but because—things like that don't deserve to live, Larry."

He stared at her. Something innate told him that women, more logical than men, permit few sentimentalities where what seems to them a matter of justice is concerned. But murder! He said as much.

"It wasn't murder," Joyce explained. "Billy meant to hurt him, but not to kill him. But when it was done—well, he wasn't particularly sorry. Nor am I, really. Tell the truth. Are you?"

He shook his head. "But Billy—do many people know?"

"We two. No more. Of course, he trusts us. And—he wanted me to know."

"Why?" Larry's voice was jealous now.

She understood. "He wasn't posing as a hero who would kill to defend a woman's name, Larry," she said dryly. "He simply didn't want me to think that someone else—anyone else—did it. He—thinks my opinion of—anyone at all—might be important."

"A killer—and would-be eloper. Billy's grown up into quite a man," gasped Larry.

Joyce giggled. "The Latin temperament." She caught herself. "We're rather callous, we two, to be laughing at—tragedies."

"Well, damnation, I won't weep over Weedon, and if you think I'm going to sob because my best friend didn't succeed in running away with my wife——"

"You were wonderful," she said.

"How wonderful?"

"The way you carried it off. Most men would have been so ridiculous; jealous or vainglorious—Larry, I was proud of you."

He grinned at her.

"That helps. Will you trot out other lovers so

that I may earn your admiration by my handling of them?"

"There'll be no more lovers," she said.

"No? What makes you think that?"

"I don't think. I *know*."

"Going to wear a veil?" he chaffed.

"A spiritual veil," she answered. "I'm wearing it now. Married women frequently do, you know."

"I'm blessed if I know what you're driving at," he said.

"I'm cussed if I'll tell you," she laughed.

He stared at her.

"I wish you would."

"Explain? Oh, you'd not be interested."

"Not interested? In you?"

"That almost sounds flirtatious," she said.

His stare became more acute.

"And that almost sounds as though you wanted me to be flirtatious," he accused.

"Nice women don't care for flirtations," she said.

"Even with their husbands?"

"Wives and husbands can't flirt," she stated.

"They can love," he said.

She looked judicial. "So they can," she admitted.

"I saw Aunt Martha to-day," he said.

"Oh, bother your Aunt Martha," she cried.

"I thought you liked her," he said.

"I do—but I don't always want to talk about her."

"But we're not always talking about her. I hardly ever mention her. She gave me ten million dollars to-day."

"What right had she to do that?" Unaccountably

Joyce's eyes blazed, and her voice was angry. "Did you take it?"

"Why not?" he asked. "The old dear is going to leave it to me, anyway, so why shouldn't I?"

She rose. She looked down at him.

"I think—oh, I hate you," she cried.

She was out of the room before he could even make an effort to detain her. For a long time after she had gone he sat still, miserable, unhappy. The incomprehensibility of women! A moment ago, and she had praised him because he had not ranted like an actor in a third-rate melodrama because Valdemagara had loved her. A moment later and denounced him because he had accepted money from his aunt, money which was destined for his possession at some future date.

Why? And again why?

The vaguely reproachful voice of Hogan informed him that Mrs. Tracy was not feeling well, and she would dine in her room to-night.

"Very well," said Larry dully.

But Hogan lingered. "Mr. Larry."

"Well?" Larry looked up.

"In a manner of speaking, sir, you and me, sir, we've been together practically all our lives," said Hogan. "Not all my life, because I was born so long before you, but working for your father before you, and with you since you were born and feeling, if you don't mind, Mr. Larry, more like a father than a servant—"

"What's it all about, Hogan?" interrupted Larry. "Have you, in your prime of middle life, forged my

name to a couple of checks? If so, take my forgiveness away with you."

Hogan grinned. "Not that, sir." His face became grave again. "It's the young lady, sir, Mrs. Tracy."

"Well?" Larry's voice was forbidding.

"Knowing all about how you met her, sir, and thinking at the time that it wasn't exactly right to marry a young girl like her—"

"Are you insinuating something against Mrs. Tracy?" asked Larry.

"God forbid," cried Hogan. "As sweet and fine a lady as ever breathed. But you—letting her break her heart—"

"What are you talking about?" cried Larry.

"Ain't it my own niece, Nora White, that's her maid, and don't she be after telling me that the dear young lady is weeping her eyes out every night, and what for would she be doing that except for your neglect and shabby treatment—"

Hogan dropped his voice. The habit of years was stronger than his momentary courage.

"That will be all, Hogan," said Larry. "And—er —thank you, Hogan."

At the door he paused.

"I—think I'll dine with Mrs. Tracy in her room," he said.

A knock on Joyce's door was answered by an invitation to enter. She was lying in bed, propped up with pillows, and beside her was a table set out with dishes.

"May I dine here with you?" he asked.

A vivid blush appeared in her cheeks.

"Why, of course," she said.

"Aunt Martha had no right to give me all that money," he said.

"No?" She was unaccountably embarrassed.

"A self-respecting man should take money from only one woman—his wife. Joyce, will you give me back what I gave you?"

"And what I made beside," she cried.

"Thank you," he said gravely.

Nora, followed by Hogan, entered at this moment. There was a readjustment of the dishes and food was served. Hogan, a beaming smile upon his rubicund face, offered this and pressed that upon them, and highly recommended the other, and found fault with the wine and sent for more. . . .

The dishes were removed and the servants were finally gone.

"So you told Billy that you were in love with me?" said Larry.

Apprehension leaped into her eyes.

"Yes," she admitted.

"And he believed you?"

"Naturally."

She avoided his eyes.

"A wise man, Valdemagara," he commented.

"What do you mean by that?" she inquired.

He shrugged. "Oh, nothing much. Except that Billy is supposed to be quite familiar with the ways of women. Jeanne Mazell once told me that she found it impossible even to fib to Billy, he knew so much about her sex. Odd that you could deceive him."

"He couldn't very well argue the point," said Joyce.

"Did he try to?" asked Larry.

Joyce made no answer.

"Sorry I made you hate me—about that Aunt Martha business," he went on.

"I—I think—if you don't mind, I'm tired," she said.

"Amazing old girl, Aunt Martha." He ignored her remark. "Always butting into other people's business. Got going about you to-day. The old girl thinks you're dead in love with me."

"Ridiculous," snapped Joyce.

But a certain alarm was in her eyes now.

"That's what I thought. Glad you're not. Especially after to-day."

"I don't understand you," she said.

"Simple enough. You know—Helen Wilson—killed my chances with you. Well, this Valdemagara business—oh, I'm not saying anything wrong about it. Know you too well. But sort of—well, a man doesn't care for that sort of thing, you know. And if I hadn't worn out my love for you sooner or later, why I think that that business with him——"

She sat upright. "Oh—you—you—I *hate* you," she cried.

He raised his eyebrows. "Really? Oh, Joyce, that's too silly. I don't hate *you*. I mean to say—why can't we continue good friends and all that? I mean, I've been silly. Unfair. Tried to take advantage and read into the bargain clauses that weren't there. But that's all over now. I'm sane. You're a bully girl, a great companion. Now that I've quit asking for more than friendship, can't we be friends?"

"So—so you want no more than that?" she asked.

Her voice was curiously stifled.

"Not a thing." His voice was amazingly cheerful. "I feel so much better. Like a child crying for the moon. When it definitely learns that the moon isn't obtainable, life becomes a more comfortable thing, eh?"

"You like comfort?" Her voice was a sneer.

"Of course. Don't you?"

"We're talking of what you like," she reminded him. "And I want to go to sleep," she added.

"And weep?" he asked.

Her eyes blazed.

"Weep? Why should I weep?" she cried.

"God knows," he made reply. "I can imagine only one thing that would make a girl like you weep. Love might do it. But it can't be that, can it, Joyce? Or can it?"

He was on his knees beside the bed now, his hands groping for her, finding her. . . .

"B-but you've got over your love for m-me," she whimpered.

Now his groping hands had found her, and she was within the embrace of his arms.

"Please, please," she gasped. "Nora——"

He laughed. "I don't think Nora will come to-night, dear. You see—I locked the door."

Larry was going over some possessions treasured since childhood. He called to his wife. Joyce came to his side.

"I knew," he said, "that I'd find it. That picture of a little girl that reminded me so of you. Here it is. See the resemblance?"

"I've got over the snub nose, haven't I?" she commented.

"*You* have? Why, this was a little girl in Maine——"

"Don't you remember I said—to the newspaper-men, I'd known you a long time? Well, I remember you as a little boy sailing your boat—did you think I lied?"

"Yes," grinned Larry.

"Did you care if I was a liar?"

"Not a bit," he cheerfully replied.

She kissed him.

THE END











